



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

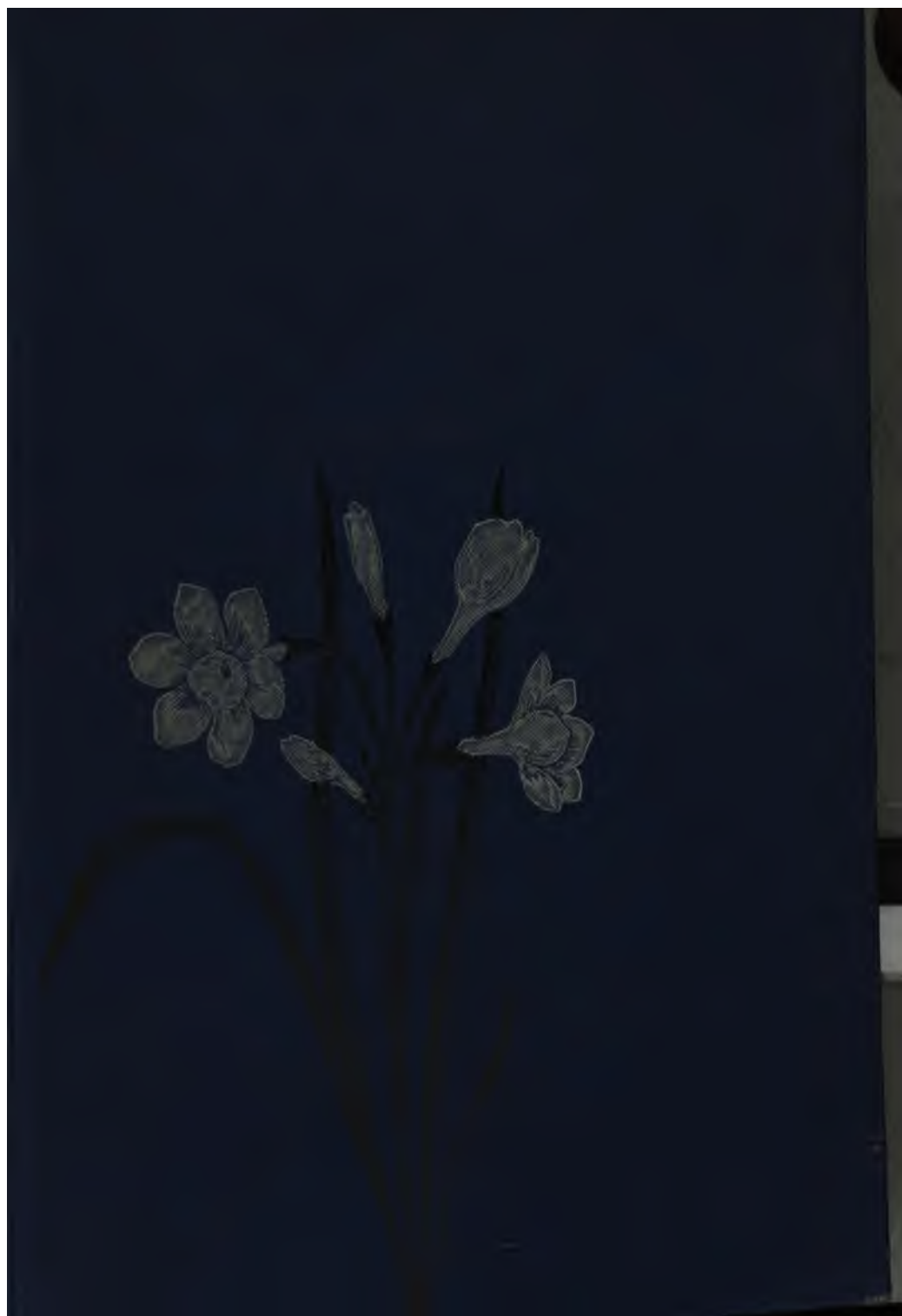
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





GLADYS FANE.

THIS STORY IS INSCRIBED TO
WILLIAM BLACK,
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF OLD FRIENDSHIP,
AND
UNFEIGNED ADMIRATION
OF A GENIUS WHICH HAS ENRICHED
THE
LITERATURE OF ENGLAND.

October, 1883.

GLADYS FANE

A STORY OF TWO LIVES

BY

T. WEMYSS REID

THIRD AND CHEAPER EDITION.



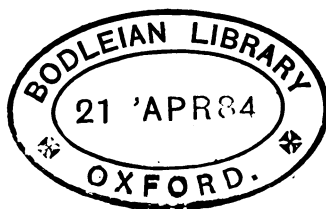
London

T. FISHER UNWIN

26 PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1884

256. e. 225.



UNWIN BROTHERS, THE GRESHAM PRESS, CHILWORTH AND LONDON.



CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.					PAGE
THE ROMANCE OF A BALCONY	...	...	...	...	I
CHAPTER II.					
THE FANES OF FANESFORD	...	...	...	...	9
CHAPTER III.					
LORD LOSTWITHIEL	...	...	...	...	21
CHAPTER IV.					
"A BOLT FROM THE BLUE"	...	...	...	...	31
CHAPTER V.					
COLD FEBRUARY	...	...	...	...	40
CHAPTER VI.					
THE PORTRAIT AND ITS ORIGINAL	...	...	...	...	49
CHAPTER VII.					
A TERRIBLE RADICAL	...	...	...	...	59
CHAPTER VIII.					
ELECTIONEERING TACTICS	...	...	...	...	70

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER IX.	
THE DEFEATED CANDIDATE	83
CHAPTER X.	
LADY JANE	95
CHAPTER XI.	
MY LADY'S BOUDOIR	105
CHAPTER XII.	
A SOIREE AT THE CYCLE CLUB	115
CHAPTER XIII.	
LADY JANE'S "SYSTEM"	126
CHAPTER XIV.	
"BY PASSION DRIVEN"	140
CHAPTER XV.	
THE CLIMAX OF OFFENDING	150
CHAPTER XVI.	
IN THE LIGHT OF THE MORNING	162
CHAPTER XVII.	
EXILE	175
CHAPTER XVIII.	
"HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE"	188
CHAPTER XIX.	
A PRINCE TO THE RESCUE	202
CHAPTER XX.	
A LIMB OF THE LAW	215
CHAPTER XXI.	
THE WORLD IS SO SMALL	227
CHAPTER XXII.	
IN WHICH THE STORY STANDS STILL	238

CONTENTS.

vii

	PAGE
CHAPTER XXIII.	
THE LAND OF THE LOTUS-EATERS	251
CHAPTER XXIV.	
A PALACE OF SIN	263
CHAPTER XXV.	
A MYSTERY	277
CHAPTER XXVI.	
IN WONDERLAND	288
CHAPTER XXVII.	
"WILL HE COME?"	301
CHAPTER XXVIII.	
THE SECRET OF REX	313
CHAPTER XXIX.	
TRENTE ET QUARANTE	324
CHAPTER XXX.	
IN THE TOILS... ..	336
CHAPTER XXXI.	
FACE TO FACE	348
CHAPTER XXXII.	
BESSARION'S LAST WORD	361
CHAPTER XXXIII.	
GLADYS AND REX	374
CHAPTER XXXIV.	
HOW A CERTAIN GAME ENDED	385
CHAPTER XXXV.	
AFTER TWO MONTHS	396
CHAPTER XXXVI.	
ON THE PROMENADE DES ANGLAIS	408

	PAGE
CHAPTER XXXVII.	
IN PARIS AGAIN "..."	420
CHAPTER XXXVIII.	
"JUXTAPOSITION, IN SHORT "..."	433
CHAPTER XXXIX.	
AN ENGLISH SAINT "..."	446
CHAPTER XL.	
THE HARBOUR LIGHTS "..."	459





GLADYS FANE.

A Story of Two Lives.



CHAPTER I.

THE ROMANCE OF A BALCONY.



HE sun was slowly sinking westwards and the long May day was drawing to a close. Though the London season was not yet at its height, and people were still looking forward to the fierce social delights of June, the West End was full enough and gay enough to justify those who declare that London in May is the brightest and liveliest of cities. In the Park on this sultry afternoon the string of carriages was as long as it was likely to be at any season of the year, and the Row was crowded with riders of both sexes. Even here, in Wilton Gardens, there were signs of the all-pervading gaiety of the fashionable quarters of the town. Carriages were rolling up in quick succession to

certain doors where five o'clock teas were in progress, whilst powdered footmen were making the square resound with the echo of their vigorous application to the knockers. The balconies of some of the houses were a blaze of colour, from the flowers artistically arranged by the cunning hands of the gardeners in the great china pots and boxes; whilst the striped awnings that partially enclosed others suggested to the heated passers-by on the pavement luxurious ideas of shade and comfort, and gave to our dull English buildings a richness of colouring that must have brought visions of Italy to the eyes of travelled men and women.

There was one balcony that had no adornment either of flowers or awning, to which nevertheless more than one fair lady as she passed in her carriage turned her eyes with marked attention. About the balcony itself there was nothing singular—except the fact that a man was sitting upon it apparently engaged in reading with deep attention an evening newspaper. Now, no one can say that balconies were not designed—at any rate originally—for the use of the occupants of the houses to which they are attached; and it is hard to say why the appearance of a gentleman on the balcony in front of his own drawing-rooms should be regarded as a singular phenomenon by the world at large. Nevertheless, as a matter of fact, this sight in Wilton Gardens was a singular one; and whilst everybody stared at the solitary man who had thus chosen to read his *Globe* in public, a few who were apparently not unfamiliar with the spectacle shrugged their shoulders and smiled significantly as they drove past.

The man himself seemed to be quite oblivious of the attention he was attracting. A very big man, with a reddish face and brilliantly red hair and whiskers, he could hardly have deceived himself with the belief that it was admiration for his personal appearance that drew so many eyes to his lonely perch. But he was saved any speculation on the subject by his utter unconsciousness of the looks of the passers-by. The leading article in the *Globe* absorbed all his attention—or so

at least it must have seemed to any one who regarded him casually. But presently, if an inquisitive stranger had chanced to be looking at that particular moment, he would have seen that the occupant of the balcony glanced shyly and quickly over the edge of his newspaper towards a house on the other side of the way. Here, too, there was a balcony—a balcony gay with geraniums, lobelias, and calceolarias, and fragrant with mignonette—but it had no occupant, nor was it towards it that his eyes were turned. They were fixed upon a window in an upper storey of the house. Suddenly the face of the gazer flushed with a colour so vivid that by contrast it made even his ordinarily florid complexion seem pale: the newspaper he held in his bejewelled fingers visibly shook, and he heaved a sigh that would have been more in keeping with the twilight associations of a country lane than with those of Wilton Gardens.

"She is there," he said softly to himself. "That is her bonnet, and her mantle too, I'll swear."

He had averted his gaze from the window, and once more appeared to be intent upon the *Globe*. But his breath went and came in quick short gasps. It would have needed no great acuteness on the part of any one who had been near enough to watch all his symptoms to decide that he was in love. With trembling hand he screwed an eye-glass into its place, and then peeping quickly round brought the window again within range of his vision. Yes; there was no doubt about it. A slim female figure was standing there, with face turned towards the balcony on which he sat regardless of the passers-by, and even of the personal inconvenience at that moment occasioned to him by the fact that a neighbouring chimney was on fire. A sharp sensation of delight—so sharp as to be almost painful—ran through his whole frame; and then drawing a deep breath, and carefully holding the *Globe* in such a fashion as to conceal his face from any one passing in the street below, he stared long and steadily at the woman in the window.

Did she know that he was there? Had she seen him before?

Could she have guessed his secret? Did she wish to encourage him? These were the questions that flashed instantaneously through his mind, and renewed his agitation. To a calm and dispassionate observer it would have seemed that there could be no doubt as to the answer to be given to one at least of these questions. A gentleman, with florid complexion and red whiskers, who stood six feet high in his stockings, and who was broad in proportion, was not so insignificant an object as to be easily missed by any one who chanced to be looking out of a window across the way.

Apparently the man on the balcony convinced himself upon this point. "My darling," he murmured to himself in a low, pleasant voice, "my darling, she sees me. She must have seen me yesterday and the day before, though she only peeped out for a moment. She means that I should see her now; for she is standing there quite motionless. I know she is watching me. My sweet Gladys!"

Love is not a thing to be laughed at by any one. Though to boys and girls it often seems a laughing matter, to the scarred veteran it has a significance which forbids unseemly mirth, even when the man who waxes sentimental is big and stout, and red-whiskered, and hardly in his first youth. No doubt this spectacle of the balcony was ridiculous enough. A man of thirty-two sitting there in the soft twilight of our misty London atmosphere, in full view of the wondering passers-by in the street below, with his eyes fixed on the slim figure of a girl at the window opposite—what could be more absurd? But the man was in love; and despite his size and his whiskers, and the folly of the whole performance in which he was engaged, there was real pathos in the agitation which he vainly tried to master, as the bright colour went and came in his cheeks.

He looked up and down the expanse of Wilton Gardens. For a moment hardly anybody was to be seen. A policeman was talking at the corner to a kitchen-maid, a solitary hansom was being slowly driven away from a house, where it had set down a visitor, by a meditative cabman. No; there was no-

oody looking. The gentleman on the balcony satisfied himself upon this point, and then, with a quick movement of his hand, he blew a kiss across to the window where the girl stood. A moment afterwards she had disappeared from view ; but ere she went there had been a slight motion of the head, which the other was justified, from his point of view, in regarding with peculiar satisfaction.

He continued to hold the *Globe* in his hands, and even turned the pages with much show of a desire to master its contents. His eyes, however, were fixed where all persons of well-regulated mind would expect them to be, upon the window which had just presented so fair a vision. But there was no reappearance of the beloved object. A quarter of an hour had passed, and he was beginning to feel a little stiff, and—sad to tell—slightly rheumatic, for May days in London are apt to be dangerous when there is a touch of east in the wind. He was thinking of leaving the balcony, when a sound of horses' hoofs on the pavement below him attracted his attention. A gentleman of mature age, accompanied by two young ladies also on horseback, was riding slowly down from the direction of Piccadilly. When the man on the balcony saw them he started violently, and, polishing his eye-glass, stared at them with an expression of wild incredulity. As he did so the strong warm colour of his face mounted to his very hair, and then in an instant he turned positively white with dismay. The group of riders paused at the house at which he had been looking so long and earnestly. The door was thrown open. The young ladies alighted, and with elastic step tripped into the house : but as the elder passed through the door she cast one swift flying glance across the road towards the fatal balcony, and if one had been near enough it would have been possible to see something like a smile of gay derision flit across her wonderfully handsome face.

Up on the balcony the man sat shivering, whilst big beads of perspiration formed themselves on his forehead. What—what could it mean? he asked of himself with the helpless

bewilderment of a weak-minded person who finds that he has made a great mistake. *That* was Gladys Fane who had just come home with her father from her afternoon ride in the park. Yes ; upon that point it was impossible to entertain the slightest doubt. Then slowly he grasped the unwelcome truth that it could not have been Gladys whom he had been watching at the window, and to whom—he almost fainted at the recollection !—he had kissed his hand. He sprang up in something like a rage, upsetting the chair on which he had been sitting. The noise of its fall echoed across the square, and almost instantly brought a man-servant of demure aspect to a window that gave upon the balcony.

“Did your Lordship call?” said the man, who was evidently aware that his master had done nothing of the sort, but who, with the truly conservative instincts of a servant in an aristocratic house, regarded with profound though well-dissembled suspicion so great a breach of ordinary usage as the conversion of a balcony in Wilton Gardens into a peer’s reading-room.

“No ; that is—yes. Take away this confounded chair, and let me have some seltzer water in the library at once.”

And the big red man, who was none other than the Earl of Lostwithiel, strode through the open casement and disappeared into the somewhat dim recesses of his town house. Poor fellow ! He was one of the most kindly of men. Even the possession of a coronet and thirty thousand a year had failed to spoil him ; and those who knew him well regarded him with something like enthusiasm. But he was morbidly shy and sensitive, and he was in love—in love for the first time since he was a boy, and with a girl barely half his age. Is it wonderful that, with a painful consciousness of the fact that he had been making an ass of himself, and a dismal sense of disappointment at his heart as he thought of the bright visions in which he had been indulging a few minutes before, he should have felt for once decidedly out of temper ?

The well-trained Simmons observed all the marks of agitation and peevishness displayed by his master with an imperturbable

countenance. But even Lord Lostwithiel could hardly be blind to the fact that Simmons was perfectly acquainted with the why and the wherefore of his sudden outburst of anger. We still keep familiar spirits in our houses to spy upon our every action, though they eat of our salt and wear the clothes we buy for them.

"Did you do exactly as I told you, Clare?" The question was put by the beautiful girl whom Lord Lostwithiel had just seen returning from the park at the moment when he believed that she was watching him from the window of her room.

"Yes, miss. I did just as you said. I waited till his Lordship came out, and began to read the newspaper; and then I slipped on your bonnet and mantle and stood where you told me to."

"And did he see you?" was the question next put with eagerness.

"Oh, yes, miss, he certainly saw me. He sat there as if he'd been struck all of a heap; and then his Lordship kissed his hand to me twice," said Clare, with a simper of satisfaction.

"Oh, what fun! I call it quite too ridiculous!" And the young lady who was at the moment submitting her dark brown hair to the attentions of her maid, laughed with all the reckless abandon of sweet seventeen.

"I think, Gladys, you ought to feel thoroughly ashamed of yourself for treating Lord Lostwithiel so disgracefully. If he should ever find out, what can he think of you?"

The speaker was the younger sister of Gladys. Her pale face and thin lips presented a striking contrast to the rich ripeness of the other's beauty.

"Now, Miss Prim, I did not ask your opinion," responded Gladys, with perfect good-humour. "But since you've favoured me with it, let me tell you that I have only treated Lostwithiel as he deserves. Do you think I'm going to have a man staring at me all day long from a balcony? That may be the fashion in which they make love to servants; but it is not a style I

admire. Come, Bertha, don't you think it quite too absurd for a great big man like that to be sitting there with all the smuts falling on his face, and all the servant-maids laughing at him? Besides, what can the man want, behaving in that fashion? Does he suppose I am in love with him, or likely to be? Why can't he let me alone?"

Gladys Fane had manifestly a strong sense of humour. The beautiful mouth broke into smiles at every moment as she spoke, and, young as she was—a *débutante* in her first season—men had already discovered that when Gladys Fane smiled, her face was one of the loveliest they had ever seen. Possibly it may have been some consciousness of the fact that she never looked so handsome as when her dark-blue eyes gleamed with suppressed merriment, or her lips bubbled over with laughter, that led to her being so constantly in the laughing mood. But on the other hand, it must be remembered that she was a motherless girl of seventeen, petted at home, admired abroad, a very queen in the circle in which she moved, and with no more knowledge of the realities of life than that possessed by the pair of love-birds who were billing and cooing in the gilded cage in her boudoir. What wonder that she saw the world through a rose-coloured medium? What wonder that her natural gaiety and high spirits occasionally led her to laugh too loudly, or perhaps at the wrong moment? As yet she had but one idea of life, and that was to get the greatest pleasure, or, as she would have said, "the greatest fun," out of a mystery of which she had only seen the happy and the humorous aspects. That it had another side, and that in very truth it was not, upon the whole, a laughing matter, it had hardly entered into her mind to conceive.



CHAPTER II.

THE FANES OF FANESFORD.



FATE plays strange pranks with men and women. There are thousands of people among us who must often have felt during the course of their lives that they were very much in the position of the mouse with whom the cat is playing, preparatory to the final leap. They are free agents—seemingly. They may run hither and thither—within certain limits. But at any moment the monster in whose power they are may pounce upon them, and with one stroke of its powerful arm reduce them to a state of agonized impotence. We call the monster Circumstance. It is a clumsy name, used to express in a very uncouth fashion a terrible reality. For we are all of us, alike the strongest and the weakest, the creatures, the slaves of Circumstance, and not seldom is it that the first link in the fetters which bind us was forged generations before we were born to a consciousness of life.

How had it come to pass that such a girl as Gladys Fane was to be found in the family of which she was a member? It was a problem that had often puzzled honest Mr. Fane himself.

For centuries the Northumbrian family of the Fanes had held their own among the more distinguished of the Commoners of England. In antiquity and social rank there were very few to vie with them. To be Mr. Fane of Fanesford was to occupy one of those exceptional positions in society which are almost if not absolutely unknown outside the limits of Great Britain. The head of that illustrious house had never stooped to a title. There were baronets and peers among the cadets of the family; and once in every thirty years or so a grateful Prime Minister went through the form of asking the Mr. Fane of the day to accept a peerage. It was understood on both sides to be nothing more than a form; and the master of Fanesford would decline the proffered honour with the easy dignity with which a man who knows himself to be really distinguished refuses to change his place at a table where the topmost seat has been usurped by a *parvenu*.

About the distinction of these Fanes there was no doubt in any mind. Even the common people around Fanesford never made the mistake of supposing that the owner of the place, the sole appendage to whose name were the letters M.P., was not a much greater personage than his neighbour, Lord Lostwithiel, whose grandfather had made a fortune towards the close of the last century, and had been rich enough to buy boroughs and a coronet. But when you asked whence came this unquestioned distinction of the illustrious house, the only answer that could be returned was that it consisted in their power of sitting still. It was because they had been at Fanesford from time immemorial, and because of this chiefly, if not solely, that they were what they were. For more than seven hundred years they had been there, within the limits of the same park. The traveller who chanced upon the old footpath which led up from the river and through the grassy glades of the great demesne to the woods that sheltered the house to the north, came first upon a crumbling ruin of tower and turret, where once had stood the castle of the Fanes. It commanded the ford which gave its name to the town that now nestled snugly

under red-tiled roofs on the other side of the stream. The castle had been destroyed in one of the Border wars more than three hundred years ago ; and even then it had been venerable, and had owned a Fane as its lord. A quarter of a mile beyond the little hillock crowned by this Border stronghold, there was a bye-path, thickly overgrown with brambles and underwood. It led to what was now the darkest and most dismal quarter of the park ; and here in silence and solitude, encroached upon by the gloomy Northumbrian firs, stood four ghostly walls, pierced by many a mullioned window—all that remained of the Jacobean hall which, after an interval of some scores of years, had succeeded the castle as the home of the Fanes. It had been burnt down one windy November night, somewhere about 1790. At the time it was hardly old enough to be venerable ; for a mere century and a half of existence counts for little in the story of such a family as the Fanes. But it was old enough to gather about it some ugly family traditions—traditions which compared by no means favourably with those earlier legends that related to the Fanes in the days when they held the old castle yonder against rieving Scot and rebellious Southron, and when, at least, they lived their lives up on the hill-top, in the free air of heaven, and not, as they must have done whilst they dwelt in the hall, in the damp, dark marshlands, shut out from the observation of their fellows by the waving, sinister branches of the elms and the firs. There was even a story connected with the burning of this dismal mansion—a story in which a wronged wife, who came of no English blood, but who had been wedded to the Fane of his day when he was a younger son and a traveller in foreign parts, was the most conspicuous figure. Nobody knew and nobody cared for the rights or the wrongs of the story. It was an episode in the family history that was wholly alien to their established traditions ; and Time with kindly hand had wrapped it in oblivion. That the fire-smitten hall was said to be haunted, and that the ghost was that of “ the dark lady,” are facts which go without saying. It would have been against the order of

nature if such a ruin had not boasted of such an inhabitant. But the Fanes had never seen the ghost ; nor did they believe in it. They were altogether too prosaic, too much absorbed in the ordinary round of country life, to trouble themselves about the wrongs or the sins of their great-great-grandmother. It was left to some belated townsman who chanced to cross the park at nightfall to thrill his neighbours from time to time with stories of the supernatural.

At a distance of fully a mile from the gloomy coppice, in the midst of which the ruins of the old hall stood, was the house now actually occupied by the family—a rambling, unpicturesque edifice, belonging to the pre-æsthetic days of George the Third. Better, perhaps, than either of the other houses, it symbolized the character of its occupants. It was large, costly, comfortable, and commonplace. All round it stretched a vast expanse of grass, dotted with clumps of trees. No one could look at it without feeling certain that this was the residence of a family of position ; nor could any one accustomed to draw inferences look at it long without arriving at the conclusion that the aforesaid family, though they might have position and wealth, were not blessed with much originality.

As a matter of fact, the chief virtue of the Fanes was still their limpet-like power of sticking to a place. All around them the world was moving, and occasionally moving very fast. But the Fanes seemed to float slowly down, not the mainstream of time, but a sluggish bye-wash, which was undisturbed by the currents and unruffled by the breeze upon the river itself. The Fane of to-day was the counterpart of the Fane of a hundred years ago ; just as the latter was in all probability the counterpart of the Fane who had “stood for the King” in the days of the first Charles, or of the earlier Fane who had taken the field with his kinsman Harry Hotspur. There was something almost awful to the imaginative person in the antiquity of this race ; something overwhelming in the thought of the traditions and experiences represented by their unbroken

line of descent. But, perhaps, more strange and striking than anything else was the fact that the outcome of it all was what it was. The cross-legged figures of a dozen Crusaders who had borne the family name were still to be seen in the old Norman church that stood hard by the ruined castle; and there was a well-worn brass in the chancel pavement that covered the bones and recorded the virtues of that fair Barbara Fane at whose feet Charles the Second had knelt in vain. The history of the family was redolent of romance, in short; and yet as the outcome of it all, the Faness of Fanesford were the most prosaic, commonplace, and humdrum of mortals.

The particular Fane who held sway in the family house to-day had—in due accordance with the traditions of his house, which required that the chief of the family should be alternately a statesman and a fox-hunter—taken up politics as a career. A certain measure of success in that pursuit he had undoubtedly achieved. He was an authority among the country gentlemen in the House—where he had sat as the representative of Fanesford for more than twenty years. He could make an excellent speech on local government or the grievances of landlords and their tenants. He had once held office of a minor sort, and he believed firmly that his country and his party would fare ill if he failed to serve them to the best of his ability.

For the rest he was a dull, choleric gentleman, much given to taking life seriously. His wife had died young, leaving him sole protector of three young children, whom he forthwith intrusted to the tender mercies of hirelings. As a Fane who had taken to politics, it was essential that public affairs should have the first place in his thoughts, and that such minor considerations as the welfare of his children should be strictly subordinated to them.

How had it come to pass that such a girl as Gladys had been born in such a house, the undoubted child of such a father? This, as has already been said, was the problem that often engaged the attention of Mr. Fane during the brief five

minutes he devoted every morning to the affairs of his razor and his family. His son and his younger daughter were all that Fanes ought to be. They had the characteristics of their race, both physical and moral. Fair-haired blondes, no one would have suspected either of having inherited a single drop of foreign blood. That they were commonplace did not trouble Mr. Fane in the least. It was not expected of the sons and daughters of that house that they should be brilliant. To have good constitutions and the honest instincts of English gentlemen and gentlewomen was all that was required of them. Their position was made for them beforehand; and even if by chance some young Fane should be born with less than the average amount of brains, the defect was to a large extent concealed by that inherited instinct—the growth of centuries of family life—which enabled the dullest of the Fanes to bear himself or herself with the *savoir faire* of one who belongs to a superior race, and who has never known anything by actual experience of the trials which vex ordinary mortals.

But what had this brown-haired, dark-eyed gipsy in common with the rest of the family? By what evil fate had it come to pass that the eldest daughter of the house in this generation had been born endowed with moral and intellectual characteristics which were altogether alien to those of her race? When some fresh escapade on the part of the brilliant Gladys was reported to Mr. Fane, he shrugged his shoulders and assumed an expression of something like despair. From her childhood he had loved her. When her mother died he had taken her to his heart, with genuine though undemonstrative tenderness; and he believed that no earthly power would ever diminish in the slightest degree the affection he felt for her. But the longer he lived the more thoroughly he was convinced that although a Fane by blood, she was not one in spirit. No daughter of the house whose memory tradition preserved had ever been as this girl was. For Gladys was a child of Nature. Her delight was in horses, in manly sports, and in mischief. Again and again her father had been shocked by encountering

her, as a mere child, with torn dress and soiled fingers, returning alone from an expedition to the woods, laden with blackberries, or flowers, or ferns. It was useless to challenge and dismiss successive nurses or governesses. However stern might be the injunctions laid upon each new-comer as to the measures of restraint that were to be employed against Miss Fane, that young lady had proved herself more than a match for the most strait-laced of her keepers. In dexterity, in fertility of resource, in downright impertinence and in graceless impenitence, she was unapproachable; and there was not a restriction laid upon her which she did not evade with all the ease with which the professional conjurer escapes from the bonds in which he has been tied by a confederate.

The climax of the offences of Gladys was reached when she was fifteen. She was missing one morning from the school-room—no unusual occurrence. It was a bright December morning, when the air was without a touch of frost, and the fresh wind sweeping into the open windows of the house, came laden with the wholesome odours of the woods and the fields. Gladys, looking out from her room, satisfied herself that it was just the morning for a ride, and, breakfast over, she slipped quietly away from the ken of the unhappy Miss Smith, who presided in the schoolroom, and hastily donning her riding-habit, made her way unperceived to the stables.

March, the family coachman, an elderly man, who had a shrewd wit of his own, and who was consequently a great favourite with Gladys, happened to be there.

"I am going for a ride this morning, March. Have my mare saddled at once."

"Very well, Miss Fane," said the man, never suspecting that the young lady was playing truant; and in the course of a few minutes Gladys was seated in triumph on her thoroughbred dark bay, whilst March, on a stout hack, was prepared to follow her. As quickly and quietly as possible she escaped from the precincts of the stables and the house. As soon as she was out of earshot she put the mare to a

gallop, with which March found it difficult to keep pace. At last a gate happily compelled her to pause in her headlong career. Blown, but respectful, March overtook her.

"I beg pardon, Miss; but where do you wish to ride this morning? Shall we go through the park, or by the Fanesford high-road?"

Gladys, with bright flushed face, was patting the neck of the mare. As March said afterwards to his confidants of the saddle room, "she was the very picture of what a young lady on horseback ought to be."

"We are not going back to Fanesford just yet, I can tell you, March. Don't you know the hounds meet at Allerton to-day? We're going to Allerton, and we shall have to be quick about it, if we are to get there in time to see them throw off. Don't look so solemn, March. I am going to hunt to-day, whether you like it or not." And giving the mare her head, Gladys once more set off along the road at a brisk canter.

It was in vain that the unfortunate coachman endeavoured to overtake her and utter some words of protest. The cob had no chance against the thoroughbred. Once or twice Gladys looked round and watched March pounding along at a very respectful distance in the rear. Then her merry laugh went pealing through the sharp December air, and she started again. The blood in her veins was like quicksilver. She could have shouted aloud with joy as she rode swiftly onward, and felt the delicious rush of the wind around her in her flight. It played havoc with her curling hair; but what of that? For the moment she was simply intoxicated with the fulness of youth and life. Her home, her father, her lessons—all were swept from her remembrance in that delightful hour; and she was hardly conscious of anything until she drew up in the midst of the red-coated throng at Allerton, five miles as the crow flies from Fanesford.

And here many a curious glance was cast upon her; for it was notorious throughout the whole county that Mr. Fane,

good sportsman though he was, had a strong objection to seeing young girls in the hunting-field, and had even uttered severely disparaging remarks concerning some of his neighbours who allowed their daughters to take a leading place in the flight after the hounds.

Meanwhile Miss Smith, with the docile Bertha, was awaiting the return of Gladys in mingled anxiety and alarm. It was bad enough that she had taken French leave, and gone off for a ride when she ought to have been in the schoolroom. Anything worse than this, even Miss Smith, with a considerable knowledge of her pupil's faults, did not dream of. That a daughter of Mr. Fane, in defiance of that gentleman's well-known and positive commands, should have surreptitiously joined the hunt, was an enormity too great to be conceived.

But the hours passed, and no Gladys made her appearance. Luncheon came, and her chair was vacant. Providentially, as Miss Smith put it, Mr. Fane had business in the neighbouring town. As a rule he had luncheon with his children, and if he had been at home he must have missed the truant. As it was, the knowledge of her absence was confined to her sister, the governess, and the servants. The short December day was beginning to wane, although it was only half-past two of the clock. In a fever of anxiety by this time, Miss Smith, accompanied by a maid, sallied forth in search of the lost girl. She soon ascertained the road by which she had left the park, and hurried in that direction. Her ears were presently gladdened by the sound of a horse's feet, and she gazed into the distance, hoping to see Gladys. Alas! it was Mr. Fane himself, who came up to them at a sharp trot. He was surprised at meeting the governess, and when he saw the look of alarm upon her face he became uneasy.

"Is anything the matter, Miss Smith?"

A few words, uttered in tremulous tones by the agitated governess, made him acquainted with the facts.

"Gladys gone out riding without permission, Miss Smith! Before ten o'clock; and it is now nearly three? I must

inquire into this at once!" and with a face of thunder the lord of Fanesford, wheeling round, turned his back upon the luckless woman, and set off down the avenue towards the boundary of the park.

He had not gone many yards when his daughter herself made her appearance. With hair falling in a wild tangle half-way down her back, and habit splashed with mud up to her waist, but with a smile of triumph on her lips and a blood-stained brush dangling from her saddle, Gladys seemed to her father's eyes to look everything that Miss Fane of Fanesford ought not to be. It needed no words from her, or from the exhausted March, who was wearily trotting behind her on his worn-out cob, to explain the situation. The squire saw it at a glance.

"Gladys!" he cried, and his tone made the girl turn suddenly white with dismay.

"Oh, papa," she said, trying to assume her usual air of gay indifference, "we have had such a delightful ride. We have been with—with—the hounds; and Sir William gave me this!" and she held up the brush.

Her father made no response. He could not have trusted himself to speak to her just then; so terrible was the passion surging within him against the daughter whom he loved. Poor man! he saw in a moment all the consequences of that escapade: how all his neighbours would chatter and chuckle over his daughter's act of flat rebellion, and how every word spoken by himself in the past against "hunting girls" and fast young ladies would now be returned to him with interest—behind his back. He felt as if he could have struck her in his rage; and he dare not even look at her as she rode, in a glorious disarray that seemed to heighten her beauty, by his side.

But at least he could speak to the wretched man who was the partner, and possibly the instigator, of her misdeeds. He was too proud to let his passion light even upon March in its full fury in the presence of the trembling Miss Smith and the not less frightened maid. But there was something in his

voice as he bade March see him the next morning before breakfast that caused a cold shiver to run down the spine of the unfortunate coachman.

That evening before dinner, Gladys was summoned to her father's room. She found him outwardly calm ; though within his passion was just as hot as ever.

"Wretched girl ! What would your mother have thought if she could have seen you this afternoon ?" were the words with which he saluted her as she entered.

The girl grew pale, and hung down her head. Her mother's name was the one charm which could affect her proud and impetuous spirit. If Mr. Fane had been a wise man he would have been content with dwelling upon this theme ; but he was too headstrong and, perhaps too vain, to do so.

"I am glad she is not here. Yes ; you make me glad that she cannot see you as I have seen you to-day, bringing disgrace upon your name and upon me."

The colour came back to the girl's face. She drew herself up with a proud air of defiance. A bright spot burned on each cheek, and the exquisitely chiselled lips met firmly. She thought that her father was about to strike her ; but she did not flinch. She only said—

"I hope, sir, I shall never do anything more disgraceful than I have done to-day whilst I am your daughter."

Mr. Fane's uplifted hand seemed to justify the belief of Gladys as to his intentions. But she had wronged him. He was passionate, and exceedingly impatient under contradiction—as a man of his pedigree and acres might be expected to be. But he was a gentleman. With a great effort he controlled himself, and addressing the lovely girl, whose beauty at that moment struck even him with a sense of wonder, he said in a husky tone—

"I think you must be mad. You are no longer a mere child, and yet you seem bent upon disgracing me and breaking my heart with your low habits. Go to your room, and stay there till I give you permission to leave it."

She dropped a curtsey, the humility of which was overdone, and still with the look of proud defiance on her face she left the room.

When she had gone, Mr. Fane, who was sorely agitated, turned to the chimney-piece, on which a number of family miniatures were ranged. His eye fell upon that of a woman dressed in the costume of 1775—a woman young and beautiful, with finely moulded features, a wealth of crisp blue-black hair, and proud dark eyes. “How like! how wonderfully like!” he murmured to himself, as he took the miniature in his hand and examined it more closely. “Gladys might have been her daughter, so far as looks go.” And then, with a sigh, he laid aside the portrait.

It was that of Dolores Fane, the beautiful Spanish woman of noble birth who had married his great-great-grandfather, and whose ghost was still believed by the country people to haunt the ruined house in the woods. Fate, it thus seemed, had played a not uncommon trick upon the Fanes, and there had been in this generation a revival at least in her physical characteristics of that ancestress whose name was associated with the misfortunes of the family.





CHAPTER III.

LORD LOSTWITHIEL.



DAY or two after the scene between Gladys and her father, Lord Lostwithiel rode over from Braydon Abbey to Fanesford. The Earl was the nearest neighbour of the Fanes in the country, but it happened that he knew comparatively little of them. He had succeeded but recently to the title and estates on the death of his uncle, and though he had often met Mr. Fane in town, a couple of dinner parties had furnished his only opportunity of meeting him in his own house. On reaching his destination, the young peer was shown into the handsome business room where for generations past the successive masters of Fanesford had been in the habit of receiving callers, and here he awaited the arrival of Mr. Fane. He was still engaged in admiring some of the trophies of the chase which adorned the walls of the apartment when the door was thrown open, and an apparition, as bewitching as it was unexpected, presented itself. A beautiful girl of fifteen, whose dark hair, swept back from her lofty forehead, hung in glossy masses round her neck, and whose dress was decidedly *negligé* in

style, burst into the room in manifest agitation. Surprised at meeting a stranger there, she surveyed Lostwithiel for a moment with critical and not altogether friendly eyes, and then bowing slightly to him, turned to leave. At that moment, however, Mr. Fane himself entered, and Gladys immediately addressed him.

"Papa, is it true? Have you really sent March away on my account? I don't believe it; but his wife says you have."

The position of Mr. Fane was hardly a pleasant one. With Lord Lostwithiel, a comparative stranger, on one side and his rebellious daughter on the other, he scarcely knew what to do.

Nor was the situation made more pleasant for him by the manner in which Gladys received his peremptory request that she would leave the room. Her spirit was evidently so far roused that she was hardly capable of estimating the enormity of her offence in thus intruding upon him; and she showed no disposition to go until she had fulfilled the mission upon which she had come. Heedless of the presence of a stranger, she gave her father to understand that for the escapade of which she had been guilty nobody but herself could be held responsible. There was something almost passionate in the plea she put in on behalf of the unlucky coachman. Fortunately for all parties, it was as brief as it was pointed, and with another bow to the stranger, she vanished almost as suddenly as she had appeared.

If poor Mr. Fane had not himself been agitated by this unexpected encounter, he could hardly have failed to take note of its effect upon Lord Lostwithiel. The latter was scarcely able to enter into conversation on the subject which had prompted his visit. He had never seen anything of the Fanesford children before, and he had never even heard those vague rumours of the beauty of the elder daughter, which were already beginning to circulate in the county. It seemed to the young man that this apparition was the most entrancing vision on which his eyes had ever rested. The slight girlish figure, despite its immaturity, had impressed him by its grace; but it

was the flashing fire of the eyes, the perfection of the features, the exquisite rose-tint of the cheeks, and the queen-like bearing of the girl, that moved him most. He was a simple-minded young man, who had lived in comparative obscurity until his accession to the title on the death of his uncle. He had seen enough of the world in one sense of the phrase, but he had not seen enough of society to be altogether insensible to charms such as Gladys possessed ; and he was almost dumbfounded by the picture he had so unexpectedly seen.

Poor young man ! As he rode homewards, after having stopped to lunch with Mr. Fane in the vain hope that he might again meet the rebellious daughter of the house, his heart was full of Gladys, and he began to count the years that must still elapse before she entered the world, and took her place in that "marriage-market of the West" in which a rich earl may, as a rule, pick and choose at his own good pleasure.

To Gladys herself the meeting with Lord Lostwithiel seemed a matter of no moment. She had not known him when she entered her father's room so hastily, nor had she cared to know anything about him. Two days of confinement in her own room had by no means softened her heart ; and she had been in her most impenitent mood when Mrs. March, the wife of the unfortunate coachman, succeeded in getting speech with her.

Her first impulse, when Mrs. March had told her sorrowful tale of Mr. Fane's anger, and of the unlucky coachman's dismissal, had been to send the poor woman away with the assurance that she could not interfere in the matter. Again and again she had watched with the utmost equanimity the departure of successive governesses, whose downfall had been brought about by her own misdoing, and in the servants' hall it was popularly believed that she was as devoid of heart as of proper pride. But in the present instance the girl's better feeling triumphed. Perhaps it was her quick imagination which enabled her to realize, from the weeping Mrs. March's incoherent description, the contrast between the cheery, garrulous,

story-telling March whom she had known, and the downcast ruined man that had taken his place, that moved her to instant action. Be this as it may, she suddenly relented; and comforting her visitor with the declaration that she would see that no harm befell the offending coachman, she forthwith espoused his cause with a zeal of which we have seen some of the results.

And she triumphed. Angry as Mr. Fane was at the conduct of his daughter, and humiliated as he felt himself to be by her behaviour in the presence of Lord Lostwithiel, he was nevertheless no match for her in a struggle in which her strong will was directly opposed to his. In the midst of her appeal to him in the presence of Lord Lostwithiel, she had not obscurely hinted that unless he yielded voluntarily to her request in this matter she would take her own means of compelling him to do so. And the method she adopted was the simplest possible. Still a prisoner in her own room, she refused either to eat or drink until Mr. Fane relented. For the whole of that day he held out against this attempt to force him into submission. But it was not in his nature to keep up a struggle of such a nature. Gladys doubtless knew what she was about when she resorted to these tactics. At all events, before night fell her fast had been broken, and she knew that March had been reinstated.

When the battle had been won, the victor showed herself unexpectedly generous. Her father was startled as he sat in his room the next morning by her entering, no longer in the guise of a young fury, but trim and well dressed as a daughter of the Fanes ought to be, and bearing in her hand a beautiful Provence rose, which she had herself cut from a tree in the conservatories. It was his favourite flower, and he saw that she meant it on this occasion to take the place of the less easily procurable olive branch.

"Papa," she said, as she kissed him with a warmth which was unusual between members of that undemonstrative family, "I want you to forgive me; and I want to thank you for taking March on again. But"—and as she spoke her bright eyes

sparkled with a slightly malicious gleam—"don't you think I may sometimes go with you to the meet? Now that I have hunted once, nobody will be surprised to see me in the field again."

After that there was a truce between father and daughter. The place of Miss Smith, who departed a month or two after this adventure, was supplied by a lady of more than common attainments and discretion, and under her care Gladys made a degree of progress which gladdened Mr. Fane's heart. But though she no longer sought congenial society among the servants, and though she even abandoned her lonely rambles in the wood, becoming, in fact, in most outward matters all that a young lady of position ought to be, she still remained an enigma to her father and the family—she was still the same proud, impulsive, reckless, laughter-loving Gladys as of old.

And so the years fled, and the time came when Gladys, now in her eighteenth year, "came out," under the auspices of an aunt, and took her place in society. The world was not slow to discover that the girl had more than the average share of beauty. But every season has its beauties, who shine upon us for a week or two, and then sink into comparative insignificance. The looks of Gladys Fane, beautiful as she was, would hardly of themselves have sufficed to save her from the common fate. It was after the first sensation created by her presentation and her subsequent appearance at a ball given by her aunt in her special honour had subsided, that men began to discover that she was a girl who, quite irrespective of her personal charms, was worth knowing. Society in 1873 was perhaps no worse than it is to-day, but it was certainly no better. Then, as now, it took delight in that which amused it, without much regard either to the nature of the amusement or to the cost at which it was furnished.

When it was discovered that the eldest daughter of that pattern country gentleman, Mr. Fane, was a young lady of decided originality, with a great gift in the way of satirical

speech and an unfeigned contempt for conventionalism, the house in Wilton Gardens began to attract men who had never cared to go there before. Even Mr. Fane's political associates accepted invitations to his Saturday dinners with greater alacrity when they learned that some one of more attractive manners and appearance than the married sister who had hitherto done the honours of his house was to be met there. The beauty of the girl, her frankness, her wit, her unquenchable love of laughter, drew around her something like a little court of admirers, and before her first season was over she had attained a certain degree of celebrity, and had received more than one eligible offer.

Nobody was more regular in his attendance at Mr. Fane's dinners than Lord Lostwithiel. Neighbours in the country, they were now also neighbours in town, and they consequently saw much of each other. The worthy peer was conscious that he did not shine in the society of Gladys. As a matter of fact, the girl, in this opening period of her career, seemed chiefly to affect the society of elderly men of the world endowed with brains. It was "mighty pretty," as Mr. Pepys would have said, to see her exchanging lively *badinage* with a Cabinet Minister, fresh from the worries of the House or of Downing-street. She flirted, of course; but there was a terrible audacity in her flirtations which disarmed suspicion. Apparently she liked better the love-making of men who were old enough to have claimed her as their grandchild, and who, as a matter of fact, had given hostages to fortune a score of years before she herself was born, than that of the gilded youth of the day. Sometimes she startled her father by the sallies of speech in which she indulged when talking with those to whom even he had looked up from his youth with a certain degree of veneration. But the venerable ones seemed, on the whole, to like the sensation; and a grey-headed prelate, whose general appearance indicated that it could not be very long before he was translated to a still higher sphere than that which he adorned in this world, was known to have spent a whole

evening by her side in the drawing-room, indulging in "chaff" which savoured more of his original calling as a cornet of dragoons—rumour had it that he had fought at Waterloo—than of his present sacred and lofty vocation.

But though Gladys kept her *beaux yeux* chiefly for the elderly celebrities of society who gathered at her father's house, it is not to be supposed that she was altogether unmindful of the young men who fluttered round her like moths round the candle. Privately she regarded them with something like disdain. Most of them, she averred, were so very young—and so very stupid. Here and there, however, she discovered those who were exceptions to the rule—so far, at least, as the second clause was concerned. With these she struck up friendships, founded upon a common love of laughter and of chaff, which, if not sentimental in their nature, had, at least, in the eyes of her father, a suspicious semblance of sentimentality. For it was to be observed that those whom she thus honoured by her preference belonged without exception to the forlorn order of detrimentals. They were younger sons, or even worse, the embarrassed heirs of hopelessly impecunious houses.

"I really wish, Gladys," said her father one day, "that you would not be quite so friendly with all these young men of no position whom you meet. Surely you might find sufficient amusement among men who are at least likely to be able some day to marry. You cannot say that there are not plenty of elder sons ready to talk to you: why do you always snub them and prefer the younger sons?"

"Because, my dear papa," said she, with a brilliant smile, "all the elder sons I have met so far have been such perfect fools, and as I suppose," she added with the prettiest shrug of her shoulders, "I shall have to marry one of them some day, I think I may be allowed for the present to amuse myself with their brothers."

It is to be feared that Lord Lostwithiel was one of those whom Gladys classed in the category of fools. The episode of the balcony, which occurred about this time, convinced her

that she was right in doing so, and there was no one whom she more delighted to snub and tease than the sentimentalist of Wilton Gardens. As for that unfortunate man himself, he was at all times the most devoted of her slaves. Never had he forgotten the vision of passionate beauty which had gladdened his eyes in the business room at Fanesford. The years which had passed since then, and during which he had seen but little of Gladys, had by no means sufficed to remove the impression which had at that time been made upon him; and when she "came out," and at once made a sensation by reason of her good looks, her wit, and her vivacity, he rejoiced to think that his early appreciation of the girl had been justified.

In one respect Lord Lostwithiel, it must be confessed, hardly came up to the average standard of the British Peerage. A very rich young Earl, he ought by rights to have set such a value upon himself in the matrimonial market as to have felt himself consciously superior to any ordinary rival. And as a matter of fact, in certain previous philanderings of a mild and innocuous description in which he had indulged, this was the view which he had taken of his own position and prospects. He was justified in doing so by the eagerness of the ordinary British mother to encourage his attentions, and by the amiable docility with which those attentions were received by those upon whom they were bestowed.

But he could never bring himself into this frame of mind when he thought of Gladys. There was something about the girl that put to flight all the theories which cynical friends had instilled into him regarding the state of the marriage market and the value of an Earl therein. There was that in her proud, fearless bearing, in the frankness with which she repelled or encouraged those who courted her, just as the fancy of the moment prompted, that reduced Lord Lostwithiel to a painful sense of his own insignificance in her presence. He was not jealous of the Cabinet Ministers, the Bishops, the learned professors, whose grey faces grew bright in the sunshine of her smiles; though he regarded their success in interesting and

attracting her with a dumb wistfulness that was almost pathetic. But a sharp sense of pain shot through his heart when he saw her encourage any of the younger men who flocked round her; and once, at least, he brought down upon himself her condign displeasure.

It was after a dinner party, at which the conversation of Miss Fane had been monopolized by a young doctor, who had just achieved fame in the scientific world. Lostwithiel had seen how completely Gladys had been engrossed by the young man's talk; he had watched, with the keen pain of a lover, the play of light and shade upon her face, the sparkle of the laughing eyes, and the constant smile upon the lips, which told that she was thoroughly happy in the position in which she was now placed. Perhaps, too, he had been goaded beyond endurance by the way in which, during the course of the long dreary meal, she had flashed across the table one of those glances full of mirth, not untouched by ridicule, with which she favoured him at times. In the drawing-room his long-pent-up feelings at last found relief.

"You seemed to enjoy the company of that young doctor, Miss Fane. May I ask what the subject was upon which he talked so eloquently?"

"Oh, he was a charming man. He was describing to me some experiments in which he has been engaged lately upon the brains of living animals. I never heard anything so amusing or interesting."

"What! did you find anything to laugh at in vivisection?"

"Oh, pray, Lord Lostwithiel, don't look so solemn. I assure you that you would have found the conversation as amusing as I did myself. There was one story the doctor told me that was quite too ridiculous. It was about a very troublesome monkey which was brought to him to be operated upon. He removed one-half of its brain, and afterwards the monkey was the best-behaved animal in the world; perfectly docile and free from tricks. I suggested to him that he might try the experiment upon his fellow-men. Would you be

willing to lose half your brain in order that your morals might be improved?"

Lord Lostwithiel failed to see the joke; he was not even softened by the charming little laugh with which the words were spoken.

"I think," he said, "these scientific persons, like writers and men of that sort, are great bores at a dinner-table. They ought to keep themselves and their opinions for their books and their lectures. I really don't know what we want having them to dine with us, as the fashion is now-a-days."

"Oh!" said Gladys, with a malicious smile, "I see, Lord Lostwithiel, that the doctor's experiment has evidently been tried upon you and has failed. The brain is gone, but the temper remains? Is it not so?"

It was impossible for a lover who was naturally a very excellent and amiable young man, and who was really ashamed of his own unworthy sentiments the moment after he had given utterance to them, to retain his sullenness under the sunny smile with which Gladys regarded him.

"I don't know how it is, Miss Fane," he said, quite frankly, "that you always chaff me more than anybody else ever did; and yet that I seem to like it."

"Ah! that is your strong point; for goodness' sake do not lose it. You are the most obliging man in the world for not being offended, whatever I may say to you. If you were different, we should have quarrelled long ago. But, please, Lord Lostwithiel," said she, the irresistible love of mischief again taking possession of her, "do not run down all the clever men whom I happen to talk to at dinner. After all, you know, one never thinks of comparing them with men like yourself."

And with this two-edged compliment Gladys vanished for the night, leaving the disconsolate lover to ponder at his leisure upon the ways of women, and finally to arrive at the determination that sooner or later he would ask Miss Fane to become Countess of Lostwithiel.



CHAPTER IV.

"A BOLT FROM THE BLUE."



APA, papa ! there is great news this morning. Just listen. Parliament has been dissolved, and Mr. Gladstone has ordered a general election."

"Nonsense, Gladys. Some one must be hoaxing you. General election, indeed ! Why, we shall not have one for twelve months to come, at least."

"But it is all here in print, whether you believe it or not, papa. Just listen to what they say," and Gladys began to read the leading article in which the editor of a well-known north-country newspaper announced that a sudden thunderbolt had fallen upon the political world from skies all blue, and that the Prime Minister of England, for reasons best known to himself, had cut the Gordian knot by the sharp stroke of a dissolution.

"Give me the paper," said Mr. Fane, still labouring under the suspicion that Gladys was either hoaxing him or being hoaxed. That the young lady was quite capable of taking the former course he knew to his cost ; and as she had a wonderful faculty for improvisation, he was by no means certain that the

ponderous editorial sentences which she read so glibly were not merely the coinage of her own imagination.

But a glance at the newspaper showed that upon this occasion at least Gladys had dealt with him in perfect good faith. It was that famous Saturday morning of February, 1874, when the country awoke to a surprise the like of which it had not experienced for years.

"Bless me! It's positively true. The man must be mad. Why, I saw Sir William yesterday, and he knew nothing about it: and he's in the Ministry himself. What on earth can it all mean?"

With deep perplexity depicted upon his countenance, good Mr. Fane began to read with care every item of information bearing upon this strange event.

As for Gladys, she was also moved by the news, though in a different way. The past winter had seemed but a dull one to the girl after the gaiety of her first season, the company usually entertained at Fanesford not being the liveliest in the world. She had been looking forward to an early return to town with her father when his Parliamentary duties called him thither; and now, to her disappointment, she saw that the meeting of Parliament must be postponed for at least a month. No wonder that her face was less blithe in its aspect than usual, as she helped Mr. Fane to his morning cup of tea.

There was another cause for the absence of her usual frank good humour. The house was not very full at present. There was, indeed, only one visitor; but then that visitor was Lord Lostwithiel, and she had an uncomfortable suspicion that he had invited himself, and that the object of his visit was one in which she was closely concerned. She tried to find consolation in the thought that perhaps the great news of the morning might drive every idea out of his head that was not connected with politics. But then, again, she remembered with dismay that, as a Peer, Lord Lostwithiel could have no personal interest even in so absorbing a question as a general election.

At that moment the man himself entered the morning-room—a fine flush of health upon his big red face.

"Excuse my unpunctuality, Miss Fane ; but I always take a walk before breakfast, and I wandered rather farther than I intended this morning. But see, I have not come in empty-handed. I was lucky enough to discover a bed of violets in a sheltered corner of one of the kitchen-gardens, and I found these flowers just out—the first, I am sure, of the year."

There was no mistaking the mingled tenderness and exultation with which the worthy man produced the three fragrant little flowers he had spent the last half-hour in procuring and laid them on the table before the girl he loved. Nor was it in the nature of Gladys Fane to receive a gift of this kind coldly. A bright smile chased the cloud from her lovely face, and to the delight of Lord Lostwithiel, she placed the tiny bouquet in her dress.

But the lover was recalled from the world of romance to that of reality by the voice of Mr. Fane, who now broke in with the news of the day.

"Great heavens, Lostwithiel ! Did you ever hear anything like this ? I say the man must be mad, stark staring mad, to have acted as he has done."

"Who is the unfortunate man ? I have not seen the paper this morning."

"Why, Gladstone, of course," cried Mr. Fane, whose own politics, it need hardly be said, were of the straightest order of Conservatism. "Palmerston was quite right when he predicted that he would die in a lunatic asylum."

"But what has he been doing now ?" inquired the other. "Is there something fresh about the Ewelme rectory scandal ?"

"Ewelme rectory ! Good gracious, no. Have you not heard—did I not tell you—that he has dissolved Parliament, putting all of us, and the country too, to the expense and trouble of a general election, simply to gratify his own wounded vanity ?" And Mr. Fane fumed afresh.

Like everybody else on that memorable day, Lord Lostwithiel received the news in the first place with incredulity and then with amazement.

"But at least," said he, when he had recovered from his surprise, "it can make no matter to you. Your seat is perfectly safe."

"Ah, I'm not so sure of that," responded Mr. Fane. "Fanesford has been ours ever since it was a borough. But the times are changing, Lostwithiel; they are indeed. This vile Radicalism is getting the upper hand of the working classes; and ever since Gladstone made that 'flesh and blood' speech of his, the old feeling towards their betters seems to have disappeared. Why, will you believe that the last time I took the chair at a meeting in the town a shoemaker in the place had the insolence to get up and protest against my voting against the abolition of purchase in the army? Just fancy that!"

"A shoemaker," said the Peer, who had not a grain of humour in his composition. "What on earth could it matter to a man like that what you did about purchase?"

"Well, perhaps, Lord Lostwithiel, the shoemaker thinks of sending his son into the army," interjected Gladys. "You know they say Lord Culloden's father was nothing more than a shoemaker. Why shouldn't the Fanesford people be as ambitious as others? If the poor man thinks that his son would make a good soldier, surely he is quite right in wishing to get rid of anything that would stand in the way of his promotion. Ah! I see how I have shocked you with my Radical ideas."

"Pray, Gladys, give Lord Lostwithiel some coffee, and don't talk nonsense," said Mr. Fane.

By this time the other members of the household had assembled. Harold, the son and heir: a broad-shouldered youth, who was already showing indications of his determination to fulfil his destiny by developing into a mighty sportsman; and Bertha, pale, delicate, prim; chiefly characterized by an intense regard for the proprieties and an abhorrence of all people who had the misfortune to be born outside the sacred pale of society. Her life was filled with little cares, little interests, and little duties. Her father was wont to boast that she had never caused

him a moment's anxiety since her birth, save on the score of her health. But even when dwelling upon this fact, Mr. Fane would turn from the correct and colourless features of his immaculate younger daughter to the ripe, warm beauty of the elder with a sense of relief.

The pleasant morning meal—that most delightful of all the meals in a great country house, where letters are read and newspapers discussed, and the family affairs debated without the constraint caused by the presence of the long-eared gentlemen of the servants' hall—came to an end at last. Even before it did so, however, Mr. Fane's agent arrived from the town, having come in hot haste on seeing the news of the day.

Gladys and her sister escaped to their own room, where the former soon succeeded in shocking the latter by the highly coloured and very imaginative sketch she drew of Lord Lostwithiel poking about among the cabbages and celery of the kitchen gardens in search of violets. It was hardly possible for this young lady to let an opportunity for indulging in the luxury of a laugh escape her. It had once been remarked by her brother, who was himself the most matter-of-fact of young men, that she would have laughed over her great-grandmother's coffin. And Gladys, when this terrible accusation was brought against her, had said, with perfect frankness and good-humour, that she had no doubt she would have done so if she had enjoyed the privilege of being present at the funeral of the estimable lady in question.

When the family reassembled for luncheon, the little company at the table was increased by the presence of Mr. Moffatt, the highly respectable solicitor who at present held the hereditary office of legal adviser and election agent to the owner of Fanesford. Mr. Moffatt was an elderly gentleman, who had known Gladys from her childhood. He had often come under the lash of her sharp tongue; but this did not prevent his looking upon her with the kindest eyes. Indeed he openly claimed for himself the honour of being the very first of the many victims to her charms. And as he was a grandfather,

and the happy husband of the most charming old lady in the county, even Mr. Fane saw no reason to take alarm at the little joke.

But to-day, in spite of the attempts of Gladys to strike up one of her customary flirtations with the lawyer, the talk at the luncheon table ran in a business channel. Mr. Moffatt had brought to Mr. Fane the astounding news that the Radicals of Fanesford, of whom the shoemaker, who was interested in the abolition of purchase, was one of the leaders, had for some time been talking of starting a candidate in the advanced Liberal interest.

"And so you really think, Moffatt," said the Squire, repeating the question for at least the hundredth time, "that these people mean to do something?"

"I know that they would like to do something, sir," said the lawyer, whose speech was tinged with an old-fashioned degree of precision; "but whether the suddenness of the dissolution may not affect their intentions I am unable at present to say."

"But if Mr. Gladstone is as bad as papa believes him to be, I should think he must have given a hint beforehand to his friend the shoemaker here, so that he might be quite ready to cut in whenever the election took place."

"My dear Miss Fane, I have no doubt that Mr. Gladstone is capable of anything—anything," and Mr. Moffatt struck the table with emphasis. "But I do not think that upon this occasion he has favoured his friends by taking them into his confidence. Your father says he met Sir William Fenwick yesterday, and he knew nothing then of what was going to happen. It has been a sudden impulse that has led him to take this course. Young ladies, you know, are not the only creatures of impulse in this world."

"And now, Moffatt, tell me," pursued Mr. Fane, "whether you have heard any name mentioned as that of a possible candidate? Do you think they are likely to get young Fenwick? I am sure Sir William must disapprove or anything of the sort."

"Young Fenwick is a worthy lad, Mr. Fane, as I have

already told you ; but I feel certain that he will never be the choice of the Fanesford Radicals. They will want some one much more advanced than he is."

"And have you any idea as to who the man will be?"

"Well, the only name that occurs to me is that of a Mr. Mansfield, who was here lecturing for the Radical Club in December. It was then that I heard they were talking of bringing out a candidate, and I suspect that he may be the man."

"A mere plebeian, I think you said he was?" continued Mr. Fane ; "the son of a shopkeeper, a tailor, I believe?"

"Something of the sort, sir ; so at least I was told."

A thrill of intense indignation stirred the family circle. Even Gladys was moved by it. That a Fane should sit for Fanesford had seemed to be as much a matter of course as that the head of the race should inhabit the family house. It was not in human nature for people brought up as they had been to hear that one of their special prerogatives was thus to be assailed, without a strong sentiment of horror. It almost seemed as though the Fanesford Radicals were contemplating an act of sacrilege.

"My dear papa ! how distressing it will be if you have to fight against a person of that description. It is really quite shocking." It was Bertha, of course, who gave utterance to this sentiment. She was not ordinarily very quick-witted, nor could any one say that her imagination was particularly vivid. But within the narrow range of her personal experiences, and of those family instincts and traditions which were no less real to her, Bertha Fane was a young lady who possessed a certain amount of acuteness ; and she already recoiled from the picture which formed itself before her as Mr. Moffatt spoke, of a possible meeting between her father and this unknown tailor's son, in which the former might positively be placed under the painful necessity of shaking hands with his vulgar and presumptuous antagonist.

"What nonsense you talk, Bertha !" said Gladys. "If the

man is a snob, I for one shall feel all the greater pleasure in seeing him soundly beaten. And he will be beaten you know papa, and thoroughly beaten, too. What fun it will be if there is a contest ! I never thought of such a thing when I read the news this morning. Have you seen the creature, Mr. Moffatt ? Does he look like a tailor, or what ? ”

Mr. Moffatt had to admit that, so far as he was aware, he had never seen the possible intruder upon the domain of the Fanes. He had heard, however, that a photograph of the man was exhibited in the shop of the Fanesford bookseller who ministered to the Radicalism of the borough.

“Then I’ll go and look at it after lunch,” cried the young lady with glee, and regardless of the protestations of her father and the remonstrances of her sister, she forthwith ordered the carriage. “I want to go into the town ; I have a little shopping to do,” she said, with unblushing countenance, by way of final answer to the objections of Mr. Fane.

“But why drive, Miss Fane ? ” said Lord Lostwithiel, with an appealing look. “It’s a bright afternoon ; may I not have the pleasure of walking with you, and then we can give our joint opinion upon the looks of the tailor.”

“The son of the tailor, Lord Lostwithiel,” said Gladys. “Pray remember what an immense difference even a remove of one generation makes now-a-days. It is the sons of the tailors and shoemakers who are getting on fastest in society in these times. The best-dressed woman at the drawing-room when I was presented was the wife of a mayor. I heard her speak, and I don’t think she had an h in her alphabet. I wonder if this Mr. Mansfield will be any better. I’m dying to see what the wretch is like.”

“And you will walk, will you not ? ”

It was evident that Lord Lostwithiel was bent upon securing the company of Gladys that afternoon. For a moment she hesitated. She had no desire to increase the opportunities for confidential intercourse between herself and the visitor. But, after all, it was hardly possible in the circumstances to refuse,

and she hoped that her sister might be induced to join the party.

"Very well, if you wish it, we can walk," she said in indifferent tones; and Lord Lostwithiel blushed with delight.

"You will come too, Bertha?" said the elder sister.

But the other had her own reasons for refusing. The reason she gave was that she did not feel the slightest curiosity as to the personal appearance of the possible Radical candidate for Fanesford; but it is more than probable that her real reason was a different one, and that she was not sorry to give Lord Lostwithiel a chance for which he evidently longed.

So a few minutes later Gladys found herself walking across the great empty park with no companion save the man who loved her.





CHAPTER V.

COLD FEBRUARY.



HE chill February afternoon made a desert of the great park as Gladys and Lord Lostwithiel walked briskly across it towards the little town, the smoke of whose chimneys could be seen curling upwards in the distance through the frosty atmosphere. All nature seemed to be under a spell of silence and of death. Above the trees, it is true, the rooks were cawing loudly, as they described great circles in the air, and wheeled hither and thither like the columns of some aerial army. But there was only their hoarse cry to remind the world of the coming time when the air would be filled with the sweet songs of the birds. The way lay through the great wood, in which stood the ruins of the hall. As Gladys and her lover walked beneath the leafless trees, the dry branches on which they trod broke with a loud, crackling sound, that dispelled the sad strange silence rudely. But the hum of the insects was absent; and even the streams, bound by the cold hand of winter, had ceased to give forth their music. No flowers; no scents; no songs of life and love! It was a cold and dreary world through which

they walked. And yet what glorious possibilities lay hidden beneath the harsh exterior! And even now the recurring miracle of the springtide was at work far out of sight beneath the black surface of the smitten earth; and all the forces of nature were engaged in preparing for the wondrous resurrection and transformation which in due season would gladden the eyes of men.

Gladys herself was in a mood which harmonized well with the day and with her surroundings. Even to her lover, who watched her with admiration as she moved swiftly ahead of him with firm elastic step, her cheeks glowing with the deep colour brought into them by the rapid motion through the frosty air, and her bright eyes sparkling with animation, it was dimly apparent that she, like the world around her, was in the cold February stage of existence.

She was good tempered almost to a fault: ready to return a kind word or a cheerful look from whatever quarter it might come; and altogether careless as to whether in doing so she might not be offending against some of the proprieties so dear to the people of her own order. A gossip with a peasant woman was just as acceptable to her as the chatter of society: and she was so far from taking thought of social distinctions that if the man who walked beside her on this winter afternoon had been a groom, she would have listened to all he had to say with at least as much attention as she vouchsafed to the Earl. The one demand she made on those around her was that they should contribute something to her amusement, should do something to keep up her girlish idea of life as a prolonged jest, in which the only wisdom was to be found in laughter.

Had she a heart? That was the very question which Lord Lostwithiel was asking himself as he listened to her incessant and inconsequent talk during their walk towards town. If he had put it to Gladys, she could hardly have replied. It was true that in that healthy animal frame of hers she possessed the organ which physiologists designate by that name. But as yet she knew nothing either of the bitterness of that heart-sickness

which sooner or later comes to all upon this earth, or of the exquisite bliss of that heart-surrender which once in a lifetime comes to most. The frosts of the early year still sealed the fountains of greatest bliss and greatest woe, and held her nature under the chill spell of immaturity. With her, as with the waiting world beneath her feet, the springtide and the summer would come in due season ; but as yet they were not.

She was only a girl, let it be remembered. In face and figure, indeed, she was already a woman : so that her companion might be forgiven for thinking of her as one. But what sort of outlook upon life is it possible to have at eighteen years ? Where is either the man or the woman who at that age can really enter into those deeper experiences and sensations which are the moving forces of our race ?

Lostwithiel was watching the slender figure as it moved before him along the narrow path with the eyes of love. The one wish of his heart was to make this glorious creature his own. In his imagination he endowed her with every noble and beautiful attribute that a woman could have ; and his thoughts pictured a future of unbroken bliss, when, with Gladys by his side, he would face the world on new conditions, and drink deep of that cup of joy which he had already learned is not to be bought by rank or riches. Like many another man who is outwardly shy and constrained, he had a wonderfully active and even audacious imagination, and at this moment he allowed it to run riot in that future on which his heart was set.

And Gladys ? Alas ! she was even now indulging in humorous mental comments upon her companion's coat, the pattern of which, a check of enormous dimensions, troubled her sense of the fitness of things. If some one had asked her abruptly during this walk what she thought of Lord Lostwithiel, there can be no doubt that she would have answered with perfect honesty that she did not like his coats, and that she detested his habit of loading his fingers with rings. She had not yet reached the point at which she was prepared to judge men by something of more importance than the clothes they

wore, or the little tricks and habits they had acquired in their passage through life. Like at least ninety-nine girls out of a hundred of her age, she was still in the stage of existence in which the visible and obtrusive externals are allowed to influence the mind to the exclusion of all thought of the realities which lie beneath the surface.

It is hard, is it not, that a man's heart should be ruthlessly trampled under foot, not because it is mean or worthless in itself, but because the man in his looks, in his stature, or possibly only in the garments he affects, chances to offend the woman he adores? Yet when a man fixes his affections upon a very young girl, that is, unquestionably, the risk he has to run.

More than once Lord Lostwithiel endeavoured during the walk to the town to bring the conversation round to the point at which he aimed; but this young lady was a mistress of the arts of verbal fence, and each time she evaded him with a laugh, or a sally of wit, or a piece of cynicism that wounded him like the point of a needle.

"What a pleasant time we had here in October—I mean the day when you lunched with us in the Dene Woods;" and the lover looked tenderly into the eyes of his mistress.

"Yes; you had a very good shoot that day. But was it not on that day you peppered that wretched beater? I never laughed so much in my life as I did at your face, as Harold told us the story. If you had killed the man and had been going to be hanged for it next morning, you could not have looked a more deplorable object, Lord Lostwithiel," and Gladys burst into laughter afresh at the reminiscence.

This was bad enough; so bad that it brought one of his characteristic blushes into the unfortunate man's face; but what followed was worse.

"Shall I tell you a secret?" she continued, giving her companion a side glance that went through him like an electric shock. "I made a series of sketches of that day's entertainment. Oh, they are beautiful, I assure you; and coloured

after nature. There are you and Harold starting in the morning in those gorgeous shooting clothes—and do you remember you kissed your hands to us as we watched you set off? Then there is the poor beater taking an affectionate farewell of his wife and children, with a dismal presentiment that he is going to meet his doom; and then I have shown the accident itself——”

“Really, Miss Fane, you are too hard upon an unfortunate fellow. How unlucky it was that I mentioned that day!”

“Do you think so? I’m quite of a different opinion. People ought not to let their good deeds die out of one’s remembrance, you know, and really your marksmanship on that occasion was wonderful. And what did I hear about you afterwards? How much was it that you insisted upon giving to the creature for having mistaken him for a pheasant? Something fabulous, if I remember aright. People said you would have to raise money on Braydon in order to pay for that day’s sport; but I suppose that was an exaggeration.”

Whilst Gladys was in this mood it was clear, even to the rather dull perceptions of Lord Lostwithiel, that no good was to be done by any attempt to draw her in the direction of a sentimental talk; so he wisely put himself as much as possible in harmony with her humour during the remainder of the walk, and got on much more pleasantly with her in consequence.

It was natural that when they entered the High-street of the quaint old town they should attract a good deal of notice. Miss Fane, indeed, was noticed wherever she went, and she was accustomed to the homage men paid to her beauty by their looks of admiration. But at Fanesford, of course, she was something more than a remarkably pretty girl; she was the eldest daughter of the man whose family had reigned there from time immemorial. Lord Lostwithiel, too, though he would probably have passed unnoticed among strangers, was known here, and the sight of an Earl in the street of a country town is not a common one.

Many an eye, therefore, watched the two as they walked

along the crowded street—for it was market day—amid the respectful salutations of those who knew them : and no doubt the gossips wagged their heads, and found full confirmation in the fact of that innocent walk for the rumour which had already got abroad, that Miss Fane was before long to become the mistress of Braydon.

“By jove ! what a lovely girl !” The words, which issued simultaneously with a puff of cigarette smoke from the mouth of the speaker, were uttered in such a tone that Gladys and her companion could not fail to overhear them.

It was a very young man who had thus given expression to his opinion. He was standing on the steps of the Bull’s Head Inn, the rival establishment to the Fane Arms, which had been for generations the Conservative house of call and the first hotel in the place.

Lord Lostwithiel looked with the calm disdain of a patrician at the presumptuous youth ; but Gladys had time to observe that he was young, good-looking, and dressed in the style of Bond-street rather than of Fanesford.

“Now, none of that nonsense, Arthur ! We have not come here to trouble ourselves about that sort of rubbish. Do for once in your life try to think about something but good-looking girls.”

The speaker was a much older man than the sudden victim to Miss Fane’s charms. Not much less than forty, he was tall and powerfully built, with pale square face and close-cropped tawny beard, which softened the hard contour of his chin. Gladys, who had been momentarily stopped by the pressure of passers-by in the street, heard these words also, and was conscious of the fact that she was being coldly regarded by a pair of steadfast grey eyes.

A faint smile lurked round the corners of her mouth as she moved on. “That sort of rubbish ! indeed,” she said to herself. It was difficult to resist the temptation to laugh aloud. If only the stranger, who had the outward appearance of being a gen-

tleman, though probably not a very amiable one, could know that she had heard his remark!

"My dear Rex," said the youth with the cigarette when the face that had attracted him was fairly out of sight, "you ought to be aware that one of the principal duties of a candidate for Parliamentary honours is to pay the utmost attention to the ladies of the constituency he is wooing. Now that is a part of your duty which I flatter myself you will best discharge by deputy, and I propose therefore to take it under my especial care. I shall begin by ascertaining the name of the fair damsel who passed just now in the company of that red-headed lout."

Arthur Ponsford habitually spoke with a drawl and a lisp. He was a young man who was regarded with reverence in a certain little club in Savile-row as being the author of a volume of poems called "Love and Gore," in which all the established institutions of society, from the Marriage Laws to the House of Lords, were attacked with impartial ferocity, and a climax was reached in the suggestion that the wrongs of mankind would never be set right until all the husbands and peers of England were "weltering in their blood." A terrible revolutionist, indeed; if you had heard him talk of a Sunday evening at the Cycle Club! But it was to be observed that even in that haunt of revolutionary agitators he was careful never to smoke more than a certain number of cigarettes in the course of the evening, or to drink anything stronger than seltzer water.

As he spoke, his companion, Rex Mansfield, barrister-at-law and journalist, as well as possible candidate in the Radical interest for the representation of Fanesford, gave a short laugh.

"I know what it is, my boy! When you have found out what the young woman's name is—and I don't deny that she is good-looking—there'll be little worth in your services till you have been introduced to her, and have induced her to accept a triolet specially composed in her honour. This comes of bringing a revolutionary poet to help one in electioneering."

"Well, to begin with, as I see the landlord here, I shall try

to learn the name of my charmer, and then we shall see whether the remainder of your frightful prediction is fulfilled."

Questioned by the young man, the landlord, a bluff Northumbrian, who though he kept the Liberal house was himself by no means a Radical, gave him the information he wanted—probably, indeed, rather more than he either desired or expected.

"The young lady in the grey dress, sir, with the scarlet feather in her hat? That was Miss Fane, the daughter of the Squire, and the gentleman with her was the Right Honourable the Earl of Lostwithiel;" and the landlord rolled out the last words with that sense of self-importance which seems habitual to Englishmen of a certain class when they have to name any one with a title.

Rex Mansfield burst into a hearty laugh.

"So much for your 'red-headed lout,' my young friend. What a mercy it is that you did not meet him unawares at the Cycle Club! If you had done so you would probably have discoursed to him at length upon the iniquities of the House of Lords, and the abominations peculiar to the rank of Earl."

"Never mind the Earl," replied Ponsford, for once forgetting to favour his companion with the usual lisp and drawl, "the Earl looks a bumpkin whether he is one or not; but it is a little peculiar that that lovely girl should be the daughter of the man you have come to fight. Is it not, Rex?"

"Nothing peculiar in it, so far as I am concerned. She must be somebody's daughter, and it does not matter to me whether her father is Mr. Fane or any other man. But I rather imagine, young man, that your discovery of her paternity is more peculiar than pleasant to you. Is it not so? No chance now of striking up a flirtation in that quarter, at all events, is there?"

"They say, sir," said the landlord, who had remained near while they talked, "that Miss Fane is going to marry the Earl of Lostwithiel."

"So I should imagine from the calf-like expression upon

the face of the noble lover," said Arthur ; who was really furious at having detected beneath the Earl's impassive countenance something of the contemptuous indifference which Lord Lostwithiel felt. "And what a pity it is," he continued, in his most affected tones, "that so pretty a girl should be thrown away upon a clown and a coronet."

The honest host of the Bull's Head was not accustomed to the conversation of the young gentlemen of Savile-row and the Cycle Club. It appeared to him for a moment that this "jackadam," as he subsequently described Mr. Arthur Ponsford in the vigorous Doric of the north, was uttering something like blasphemy. But then he reflected that no young gentleman could talk in this fashion of an Earl unless he were himself something superior even to that exalted being ; and so he regarded his guest with mingled wonder and awe.

Superior, indeed, to any Earl in Christendom, Mr. Ponsford believed himself to be ; but it is doubtful whether the landlord of the Bull's Head would have considered his claim sufficient if he had been made aware that it rested upon his ability to write triolets and revolutionary epics, and his power of living like a gentleman on five hundred a year.





CHAPTER VI.

THE PORTRAIT AND ITS ORIGINAL.



LADYS and her companion continued their walk to the shop of Mr. Brown, the Radical bookseller. A small photograph of a man occupied a prominent place in the middle of the little window, and they stopped to examine it.

"Good gracious ! why it is one of the two horrors we saw in front of the Bull's Head. I believe it is the very man who was polite enough to speak of me as rubbish."

"I hardly think he applied that term to you, Miss Fane. I can't say I like his looks either in the photograph or in reality ; but he is certainly much more gentlemanly-looking than his companion."

"You mean that brainless boy, who was smoking the cigarette, and who paid me a shopkeeper's kind of compliment," said Gladys, with an expression of disgust on her face.

If Lord Lostwithiel had only known how Arthur Ponsford had spoken of him a few moments before, he would have felt more than avenged now. As it was, he merely ventured to offer a mild suggestion to Gladys.

"Ah—do you not think it is—ah—a—little imprudent to stand here in public criticising this man's portrait?"

"Imprudent! not a bit of it," responded the young lady. "I should not mind staring at the man himself, if I were to see him. I hardly noticed him just now. He seemed to me to be decidedly common; but I merely caught sight of a big nose, a brown beard, and a coat——" She paused, and glanced at the glaring homespun worn by her companion. "Well, his coat," she continued, "was not so bad. But, of course, a tailor's son ought to know how to dress. That is an advantage this person has over you, Lord Lostwithiel."

The Peer smiled good-humouredly at the thrust. It was one he was accustomed to receive. "Yes," he said; "I know I have not your taste in dress, Miss Fane; but then, you see, my father was not a tailor."

"Goodness gracious, Lord Lostwithiel; you speak as if mine was. Pray take my advice, and when you are inclined to be sarcastic, flee the temptation. Now I am going into this shop to buy a copy of this man's photograph;" and before the alarmed Lord Lostwithiel could offer a word of remonstrance she had passed through the doorway, and stood in the presence of Mr. Brown.

The withered little man behind the counter received the pair with much respect. He was the most ardent of Radicals; but he had not attained to such perfection in his faith that he could regard with utter indifference persons so exalted in social station as Mr. Fane's daughter and the Earl. The young lady, when she was once inside the shop, showed an amount of discretion for which Lord Lostwithiel had not given her credit. There was no allusion to the photograph in the window; she merely wanted some drawing-blocks with which Mr. Brown had been in the habit of supplying her.

"I have a new kind, miss, just fresh from London, if you will allow me to show it to you," said the bookseller; and opening the glass screen that shut off the shop from the window, he brought the photograph into full view.

"What have you got there, Mr. Brown? A portrait! One of our local celebrities, I suppose. Is it the new Mayor, or that young curate at the parish church who blushes so horribly?"

"No, miss, no;" said the unfortunate Brown, himself blushing in a way that would have done credit to the curate. Then the man plucked up courage, and inspired by a sense of the dignity of the great cause of Radicalism, he laid the photograph on the counter before his fair customer.

The latter adjusted a gold-rimmed *pince-nez* on the bridge of her nose, and looked at the portrait with a languid indifference that contrasted rather strangely with the eager curiosity she had shown a few minutes before.

"Well; and who is this person?" she asked, giving the photograph as she spoke the most delicate fillip with her forefinger. There was no mistaking the cool contempt of her manner. To Mr. Brown she seemed to say by those icy tones, "I know nothing of the original of this portrait; but whoever or whatever he may be, he is a person altogether beneath my notice; somebody who belongs to a different order of creation from that which I adorn."

This was the interpretation which Mr. Brown put upon Miss Fane's words, and the worthy bookseller felt nettled and indignant.

"It is the portrait of Rex Mansfield, Esquire, miss," he said, with a certain degree of respectful asperity.

"Rex Mansfield, Esquire! A pretty name; but quite new to me. What has this gentleman done that you should use his portrait as an ornament for your shop-window? Nothing very shocking, I hope, Mr. Brown," and the dark eyes gleamed with fun and mischief.

"Mr. Mansfield, miss, is a great politician in London; and he lectured for the Fanesford Radical Club in December."

"Oh! I see," said Gladys, speaking deliberately and in tones the suppressed sarcasm of which would have provoked a saint. "A Radical gentleman from London. And pray what may his business be when he is at home?"

"He's a counsellor, miss, and practises, they tell me, regularly at Newgate."

"Oh, a counsellor who practises at Newgate. What an interesting creature he must be. But what I want to know is why you have his portrait here. He has not been practising at Newgate upon you or any of your friends, Mr. Brown, I hope?"

The irresistible spirit of mischief had taken possession of the girl, and poor Mr. Brown writhed visibly in her grasp.

"No, miss; he has not practised on me; and if you ask me why I have his portrait in the shop-window, I must tell you the truth. We mean to run him for Fanesford against your father in this election." The announcement was made with an awful solemnity of manner. It was evident that Mr. Brown expected its effect to be overwhelming.

"Dear me! how amusing! And so this is the gentleman who is to run for Fanesford, and against Mr. Fane. I should hardly have thought it, from his looks. And, of course, Mr. Brown, he will spend plenty of money in the place during the contest. Well, that will be good for trade. You must take care that he gives you a great deal of printing to do. What is the good of a contest if it does not set a little money flowing into some person's pockets? Eh, Mr. Brown!" And the terrible girl fixed the luckless man with one of her mocking glances.

"I'm afraid, miss, you hardly understand this kind of thing," he responded, with a feeble attempt at loftiness of demeanour. "My principles——"

"Oh, Mr. Brown, you must talk to somebody else about principles. I don't profess to have any myself. But this is a gentleman from London, you say, who practises at the Old Bailey, and who comes here to teach the people of Fanesford their duty. Well, get all the printing you can out of him, Mr. Brown; but make him pay for everything beforehand. These gentlemen from London, you know, are not always to be trusted."

As these words left the lips of Gladys, a sudden pallor passed over the bookseller's withered face. The little bell over the shop door clanged noisily, and the "gentleman from London" himself appeared. He looked surprised and annoyed when he saw with whom Mr. Brown was engaged; but he lifted his hat, and then stood back to await the bookseller's convenience.

It was an embarrassing moment for everybody; but Gladys was quite equal to the occasion. Neither she nor Lord Lostwithiel took the slightest notice of Mansfield's salutation. But, again making use of her *pince-nez*, she deliberately surveyed the new-comer from head to foot with an air of superb impertinence. The object of her scrutiny did not shrink from her prolonged stare. He was almost as impassive as Lostwithiel himself; and but for the suspicion of a glimmer of anger or of humour in his grey eyes, he might have been utterly unconscious of what was passing. When the slow, deliberate, haughty investigation of the stranger was complete, Gladys turned towards the bookseller, and remarked with the utmost *sang froid*—

"I am sure you will find I am right as to the best way of doing business with such people, Mr. Brown. Take my advice, and you will never repent it."

She turned to leave the shop, followed by Lord Lostwithiel. Mansfield was standing near the door; he held it open in order that she might pass; but he made no attempt to secure any kind of recognition for this common act of politeness. He had assumed the stony stare which befits all well-bred Britons who have not been introduced to each other.

The door closed with a snap behind Gladys and her companion. As it did so, the girl laughed gaily. "What a ridiculous encounter," she cried. "But, upon my word, the man is not half so bad as I thought he was; though he certainly looks a great bear."

Lord Lostwithiel had determined that, come what might, he would learn his fate during the walk homewards. The chill February day was already fading into a grey and gloomy

twilight ; and the path by the woods looked too forbidding to be attempted. This meant that he would have an additional five minutes alone with the girl he loved ; and he was thankful for it, poor young man. He was, as has already been told, shy and a little clumsy in his movements. But it must not be supposed that he was devoid of the *savoir faire* of his race. There was nothing of the clown about him, even though he wore extraordinary coats, and had a weakness for big rings. But just now his heart was beating faster than it had ever done before, save after an exciting tussle at football. How should he begin ? He knew how he ought to have begun, of course. A man of his rank and wealth was entitled to pretend to any girl, and there should have been no hesitation or uncertainty as to the result. But he had never felt certain about Gladys ; he had only known that he loved her—loved her a thousand times better than any other woman he had ever met, and that she was far too precious in his eyes for him to be able to contemplate with equanimity the thought of losing her.

As they walked up the long carriage-drive, Gladys, whose talk had continued to run on, according to its wont, in a ceaseless flow of sparkling words, became conscious that the critical moment was at hand. Something in his eyes, in the tone in which he uttered his short abrupt answers to her questions, and perhaps the sigh which escaped him unawares, warned her of the fact. She did her best to keep him at bay ; but there came an instant when her tongue flagged, and there was silence between the two. He seized the chance with eagerness.

“Miss Fane, do you remember that day when I first saw you in your father’s room at Fanesford ? It is a long time ago now ; you were just a child, you recollect, and there had been some trouble between you and your father ; and you came quite suddenly upon me as I sat waiting for him.”

“Yes, I recollect it quite well,” said Gladys. She tried to infuse the usual tone of careless gaiety into her voice ; but, somehow or other, she did not quite succeed. For once, she felt that she could not laugh at her suitor. In the presence of

the man's intense earnestness, it was impossible to treat love as a mere jest.

"I am so glad you remember it. I have never forgotten that day. Do you know what I thought as I rode away from the house that afternoon?"

"I cannot read your thoughts, Lord Lostwithiel. I suppose, though, you felt that I had disgraced myself and my family, as I very often succeed in doing, according to some people."

"I thought," he continued, without noticing her remark, "that I had never seen any one so beautiful as you were. No, don't laugh at me, my dear," he added, as Gladys, with a somewhat forced smile upon her lips, curtsied profoundly to him in acknowledgment of his words. "I am not paying you a compliment, you know. You get plenty of compliments on all sides, and I never was much of a hand at that kind of thing. But I thought that day, as I rode back to Braydon, not only that you were the loveliest little girl I had ever seen, but that some day you would be the most beautiful woman in the world."

"Pray, Lord Lostwithiel, do not go on any further, unless you wish to turn my head completely," cried Gladys, making one last despairing effort to ward off what she now saw to be inevitable. "Consider how weak-minded we women are at all times, and don't make me more vain than I am by nature."

Her lover was not to be baulked of the chance that had offered itself to him. He came suddenly to the point.

"Can't you see that I love you, Gladys? You must have seen it for a year past at least. Tell me, my darling, if there is no hope for me?"

He stood still facing her in the growing dusk, and as he did so he stretched out both his hands imploringly towards her. The face of Gladys had grown pale, and there were tears in her eyes. She really liked him, after a fashion, and for the moment her heart was moved by the passionate eagerness with which he manifestly awaited her reply. She forgot even his red hair, his rings, his clothes, and saw only that sight which

no woman with a heart can regard entirely unmoved, a strong man struggling with a hopeless love inspired by herself.

He tried to take her hand in his ; but she tore it from his grasp, and, covering her eyes, said—

“No, no, no, Lord Lostwithiel ! Oh, you should not have spoken so ; you should not have spoken so.”

“Have I been too hasty ?” he asked. “If I have, let us wait ; and I can come again, and ask you then when you are better prepared. But you won’t send me away without any hope, Miss Fane. I have wanted you so long, and I have thought about it so much. And you know it will be a good match for both of us. Braydon and Fanesford are so near that you would not really be leaving home if you came to me ; and I should do everything I could to make you happy—you know I would.” He uttered the last words almost fiercely. He hardly knew what he was saying ; he only saw the beautiful girl standing before him, as he had never seen her before, with bowed head and covered face—a picture, it might have seemed to any passer-by, of contrite humility.

But Gladys quickly recovered her self-control.

“Lord Lostwithiel,” she said with a grave voice that sounded strangely unlike the voice of the Gladys of every-day life whom he knew : “I’m so sorry. But I am sure you are deceiving yourself in thinking you care so much for me. You have fallen in love with an imaginary Gladys Fane, who is altogether different from the real one. Do you really suppose that I am the sort of girl a man like you ought to marry ?” As she said this she raised her tear-dimmed eyes to his face, and he saw through he tears the old gleam of humour. “Why, I should disgrace Braydon by my wild ways, and what papa calls my reckless disregard for everybody except myself, just as I have already disgraced Fanesford. No, no ; you will get a good wife some day who will love you and take care of you, and make a presentable Countess. But you must never talk to me again as you have done to-day. You know how much I like you as a friend, Lord Lostwithiel, do you not ?”

The rejected lover had never seen her look so beautiful as she did at that moment, when in place of the customary vivacity there was a soft pensiveness in the face of Gladys that was not often to be found there.

"Yes; we have been good friends for the past year and more, although you have chaffed me so much. And I have liked it. Yes; I really have, upon my honour. Don't you think you get on with me very well? I am sure I should never object to you chaffing me as much as ever you liked."

"Come, Lord Lostwithiel," said Gladys, her face brightening perceptibly, "let us continue to chaff each other, and to be good friends, as of old. Why should we not be friends? I am only a girl, and a very foolish one. You will be thankful some day that I have not taken advantage of your generosity this afternoon."

"That is nonsense, Miss Fane. You know that I mean what I say; even if I am not so bright as some of the men you know. Can you not think of me as something more than a friend? Will you give me no hope? Perhaps there is——" and he paused without finishing the sentence.

"I know what you mean," responded Gladys. "No; there is nobody else. I have not seen the man yet for whom I would be willing to sacrifice my liberty, and I hardly think I ever shall see him. Really, I think you must agree with me that all this love-making and marrying is nothing but a nuisance. It would be so much better if nice people would just consent to be friends with one another. Don't you think so?"

"If there is no one else, Gladys," said her lover, "I shall still hope. You are very young, you know. Perhaps you will change your mind about marriage. Perhaps some day you may even feel that it is the best thing, or the only thing left for you to do. Promise me that you will think of me then, my dear, and that you will remember that I am waiting for you, and longing for you?"

"Oh, Lord Lostwithiel, you must not talk in that way. I am a wild, foolish girl. If you only knew me as I know my-

self, you would be very glad that I have not promised to marry you. Do not, I beg of you, think any more of me in that way. I am quite serious when I tell you that I often hope that no man will ever come in my way who can tame my spirit, or make me as most women are when they are in love. I am not like other girls. If you will believe me, I could never understand the eagerness of so many of them to get lovers and husbands. But I like to have friends, and I want you to be my friend ;” and she held out her hand to him with the proud yet gracious condescension of a princess.

There was a dull aching pain at Lord Lostwithiel’s heart—a pain so real that it seemed to him to be purely physical in its character. He had never experienced it before. The poor man, who had read and heard of broken hearts, was almost inclined to think that he was suffering from an actual catastrophe of that kind. But he had the pluck of an English gentleman ; and besides, a man of his sanguine temperament was not to be entirely crushed, even by such a blow as that which he had just encountered. He recognized the fact that for the present it was useless to press his suit ; but in the admission of Gladys, that there was nobody else for whom she cared, he found reason for hope.

He lifted her hand to his lips ; but as he did so he felt it withdrawn from his grasp.

“You may kiss my face, if you like,” said Gladys, in tones which even the vainest of coxcombs could not have misunderstood. Lord Lostwithiel felt, as he kissed that fair cheek, that the salutation which was thus permitted to him resembled that offered by the doomed victims of his caprice to Cæsar in the amphitheatre.



CHAPTER VII.

A TERRIBLE RADICAL.



REALLY don't see why you need be so scrupulous."

"Don't you, Arthur, my boy? That, of course, proves that I must be in the wrong—as probably I always am when I differ from other people."

It was Rex Mansfield who uttered these words. He and his friend Pons-

ford were sitting in a comfortable room at the Bull's Head, the litter of books, newspapers, and manuscripts on tables, chairs, and sofas betokening the fact that this apartment was their head-quarters during their stay in Fanesford.

"Sarcastic, as usual," responded Ponsford, throwing the remnant of his cigarette into the glowing fire. "But mark my words, my dear fellow? if you don't make use of every weapon that is placed in your hands, you will certainly not win this election. Fane's influence here is enormous, and you can only counteract it by fighting him at every turn."

"Oh, don't be afraid of my not fighting: but I'm not going to lie in wait for the man in the dark in order to get a chance of stabbing him in the back. Probably, as you have more

than once suggested, I am a little demented on some points, and this may be one of them. But demented or not, I have made up what I am pleased to call my mind ; and I am afraid you will merely waste your time by keeping up the conversation."

"Listen to the stubborn and ungrateful animal," said Ponsford, affecting pathetic tones. "He would like to get into Parliament ; he comes here where there is at least a chance, and by great good luck he gets into the field so quickly that he fairly frightens the enemy. Then there is a rally on the other side, and he is in danger of being beaten ; and then, just in the nick of time, he is shown the way to rout his opponents utterly, and he refuses to take it ; deliberately turns his back upon it, because of some squeamishness on his part. Was ever such Quixotry heard of in this world ! And yet he positively aspires to a political career."

"Quite true, Arthur. I *do* aspire to such a career. But then I shall only want to have it to serve my own purposes, and I must get it in my own way."

"Look here, Mansfield ; let us think of this seriously for five minutes, for, upon my life, it is a serious business. You know that you will be beaten unless you make use of this man Crisp, and take up his cause ; and you know, also, that if you do take it up your success is certain. How can you reconcile it with your conscience deliberately to let yourself be beaten by refraining from employing the weapon which, by such a wonderful piece of luck, has been placed in your hands ?"

For once Mr. Arthur Ponsford spoke with earnestness and emphasis, the usual drawl being conspicuous by its absence from his speech. Mansfield was engaged in replenishing his pipe. With much deliberation he completed this operation ; and then when the lighted pipe had been for a moment in his mouth, he removed it, and said, with a smile—

"You are very sanguine, Arthur ; but after all, even if the case were exactly as you put it. I should make no use of Crisp.

Here is a rascal of a shoemaker, as great a knave probably as ever went unchanged, who has a personal grievance against Fane. This leads him to scrutinise with the eyes of a lynx every transaction in which it may be possible to discover something to his enemy's disadvantage, and finally he finds out, as we both know, that the poor of Fanesford are being defrauded just now of some of their undoubted rights of pasturage on the Fanesford property. He finds, further, that there has been some ugly cooking of the accounts of the local charity which Mr. Fane is supposed to administer, and that undoubtedly the money that ought to have gone to the poor has been misapplied. But what then? When I look into the case, I find that nothing is more certain than that Mr. Fane himself has no responsibility in either of these matters. The question of pasturage is in precisely the condition in which it was in the days of his grandfather. There has been no change for a hundred years at least, and everybody knows that Fane has simply inherited a certain position and taken it as it came to him. As to the charity, even Crisp himself admits that the whole blame lies at the doors of others, and that Mr. Fane is entirely innocent. Yet you positively wish me to change my tactics and to convert this from a political into a personal campaign, merely because the latter seems to afford more promise of success. I confess that is hardly the kind of advice I should have expected from you."

"Well, all I can say is that if you will not use your strength to the uttermost when you have got your antagonist's head in chancery, you can blame nobody but yourself if he escapes without damage. I should have thought, my dear Mansfield," the speaker added, in more conciliatory tones, "that a seat in Parliament would have seemed in your eyes a prize worth paying almost any price for."

"I should be quite willing, so far as my means go, to pay any price for it, save one; and as that only concerns myself it is hardly worth talking about. Is it such a remarkable thing in your experience, Ponsford, to find a man who will not eat

dirt in order to secure a dignity, that you are unable to understand it? Surely that cannot be the case."

"Oh, I know you, Mansfield. When you are in certain moods you are ready to talk the hind-leg off a horse rather than give in. But do not suppose that any of your talk makes the thing a grain more right? You are simply sacrificing your chances, and, what is more, the chances of your party, to a piece of foolish Quixotry."

"So let it be," said Mansfield, with something between a sigh and a groan; "and now that the matter is settled, I shall be glad if you will let me get on with this article on 'Political Opinion in England,' which I have promised for the next number of the *Hybrid*."

The two friends forthwith devoted themselves to their respective occupations. Mansfield, with bent brow and pipe in mouth, went on with the writing in which he had been engaged when Ponsford addressed him, whilst the latter returned to the French novel—of a questionable character—which he was reading and annotating with a view to making it the basis of an essay in one of those polite organs of modern culture which enjoyed the services of his pen.

Those were stirring days in England. The news that Parliament had been suddenly dissolved fell like a thunderbolt in a thousand different parishes; and all over the country every other sound was silenced by the din of the great political battle in which the two parties were so unexpectedly called upon to engage. Mr. Gladstone was making fun of the Straits of Malacca, and was holding out hopes of the great work of reform in which he expected to be able to engage with a renewed and reinvigorated House of Commons; whilst Mr. Disraeli was protesting against the interference with class interests which had taken place during the reign of the late Parliament, and was calling upon all who wished their country to enjoy a season of tranquillity to rally to his side.

A battle of the gods, truly! It was fought by both forces with an energy and a passion that could hardly have been

surpassed ; whilst on either side the leaders vied with each other in their outpourings of eloquence and invective. And yet to those who can look back from the vantage ground of a few years' advancement upon that conflict of 1874 it must seem that, after all, neither party had even a remote conception of the issue which they were actually deciding. Who could have imagined in those days, in which "harassed interests" and "plundered classes" were invited to band themselves together in order that they might jointly secure to themselves a period of rest and safety, that the stormy season of 1876-79 was in store for them, and that England was about to enter upon a cycle of wars and rumours of wars, such as she had not known before during the lifetime of this generation ? And could those Liberals who cried out most urgently for the need of further measures of domestic reform have foreseen the hour when the whole nation, turning with something like loathing from the consideration of any domestic questions whatever, would be thrilling with horror and indignation over the stories of cruelties perpetrated in remote Bulgarian villages, or palpitating with feverish anxiety as the armies of Russia drew nearer and yet nearer to the walls of Constantinople, they might possibly have pitched their eloquence in a somewhat different key. But these things belonged to the morrow ; and it is not the way of the practical politicians of England to take note of anything that does not chance to lie within the limits of to-day.

"Blind leaders of the blind," as Rex Mansfield once audaciously observed, referring not merely to the chiefs of his opponents, but to the honoured and trusted champions of his own party, "is it wonderful that they should sometimes fall into the ditch ?"

But at the moment with which we are dealing, neither Rex Mansfield nor anybody else knew what was coming. All the great and burning questions at issue had resolved themselves into one—and that was the question of which party could secure the largest number of seats. It was the old case of "pull devil, pull baker" ; and the harder the pulling was on

one side the more vigorous was the counter-pulling on the other. Is it wonderful—considering what this poor human nature is at the best—that the rules of the game, lax though they undoubtedly are, should at times have been utterly disregarded, and that more than one foul blow should have been struck, and more than one unfair advantage taken, on both sides?

It is not with the general election, however, but with the modest little fight between the contending parties at Fanesford that we have to do in this narrative. The fight, of which we saw the first premonitory symptoms on that Saturday so fully described in preceding chapters, began in earnest on the following Monday, when Mr. Rex Mansfield, having duly issued his address to the electors, spoke at a public meeting in the Mechanics' Institution in the character of a candidate for the representation of the borough.

He was undoubtedly a great favourite with some persons in the place—chiefly the working men of a thoughtful cast, who neither spent their evenings in the public-house nor distinguished themselves by the regularity of their attendance at church on Sunday. Gifted with a talent for uttering rather biting epigrams at the expense of his opponents, and with a native taste for humour that explained the twinkle of his grey eyes, Rex was a candidate whom it was impossible to regard with neutral feelings; and accordingly before many days had passed those who had not learned to love him hated him with an intensity of passion that would have gladdened the heart of Dr. Johnson himself.

Terrible accounts reached the family at the great house as to the outrageous attack upon the settled order of things which this daring Radical was making in the sacred preserve of Fanesford. Even Gladys, who, as may well be imagined, prided herself upon the breadth of her opinions and her freedom from the antiquated prejudices of those around her, flushed with indignation at some of the sayings of Rex which were reported to her.

"If I were a man, I should go on the platform and either answer him, or, if I could not do that, horsewhip him before all his friends," she cried one day, stamping her foot in a paroxysm of anger.

"I should treat such a person with contempt," said Bertha. "But what has he said that has made even you feel hurt and indignant, Gladys?"

Gladys had recovered very quickly, according to her wont, from her sudden outburst of passion. She laughed, and said, "Well, perhaps it would be rather too strong to horsewhip the creature because I could not answer him; but I certainly wish that either papa or Harold would show a little more pluck in facing him on his own ground. Just fancy what the latest thing he has said about us is," and taking up the local newspaper, she read as follows:—"Mr. Mansfield, continuing, said that he had no wish to make that a personal conflict between himself and the gentleman to whom he was opposed. (Hear, hear.) He had not the pleasure of knowing Mr. Fane. Perhaps, indeed, Mr. Fane might feel that it was an act of presumption on his (the speaker's) part even to mention his name. (A laugh.) But he must say at once that he had come there to fight certain principles, and not a man, much less a fossil. (Much laughter.) He meant no personal disrespect to his honourable opponent; but at the same time he could not help applying that word to him. As a gentleman, Mr. Fane might be, and he believed was, everything that was admirable. (Cries of "No no," and "that's a big one"—roars of laughter.) Well, he was bound to tell them in all seriousness that he had heard nothing to Mr. Fane's personal disadvantage since he himself came to Fanesford. But he must say that socially and politically Mr. Fane was neither more nor less than a fossil, the hardened, dried, and petrified relic which represented that which had once been a noxious and dangerous living thing. (Hear, hear.) There had been a time when the lord of Fanesford had been a despot, exercising something like supreme power over the liberties, the possessions, the lives, the very souls of

his dependents. If some Rip Van Winkle who had been sleeping in the old churchyard across the river yonder for the last four or five hundred years, were to come to life again, and to "revisit the pale glimpses of the moon"—(laughter)—he could tell them who and what the Fanes were in the days of their glory; and probably Mr. Fane himself would be the first to shrink in horror and amazement from the picture thus painted of his ancestors. But in those days, there was this at least to be said on behalf of the Fanes. If they exacted from those beneath them that to which God had given them no title, if they took the sons of the poor to be their serfs and their daughters to be their bond-maids, they at least stood between them and those who might have oppressed them still more sorely. The walls of the old castle of Fanesford, now crumbling into dust, had been reared by the labour, by the toil and the blood, of the poor; but at least those walls had given shelter to the poor in time of need, and the people of Fanesford had known whither to flee when danger threatened them. In those days the feudal lord was at all events a living reality, and not a fossil. (Hear, hear.) But what was the case now? The owner of Fanesford still enjoyed the broad acres of that stately park, and whatever he (the speaker) might think of his title to that property, or of the means by which it had been kept intact during all these centuries, he would not for a moment dream of depriving its present owner of it. But why should the old feudal privileges be still possessed by one who no longer allowed himself to be bound by the old feudal obligations? (Cheers.) Was it to protect their interests, to assist them, the common people of Fanesford, that the Mr. Fane of these days went to Parliament. (Loud cries of "No.") Ah, they knew better than to suppose that it was to serve them that the Lord of the Manor took his seat at Westminster. The fox, the hare, the rabbit, the pheasant, and the partridge enjoyed a much larger share of his attention as a legislator than that which he vouchsafed to bestow upon the people by whose suffrages he was returned. (Cheers.) It was his own class—

the privileged class of titled and untitled landowners of England—whose cause he served and whose interests he maintained; and the Member for Fanesford was about the last person upon the face of the earth to whom they, the common people of that ancient borough, would look for aid and protection in case of need. (Renewed cheers.) Then, why in Heaven's name did they still bow the knee like serfs in this man's presence? Why did they so far betray their own consciences as to profess in the face of their fellow-countrymen that the Lord of Fanesford was the man who best understood their wants and who sympathized most deeply with their aspirations? Why, but because they had not yet realized that fact which he (the speaker) was anxious to bring home to them: that as a feudal chief Mr. Fane was no living reality, but a mere lifeless fossil—the impotent relic of an institution now happily extinct. (Loud cheers.)’”

Gladys possessed so much of the true dramatic faculty, that little as she liked the sentiments of the speaker she could not refrain from doing justice to the swing of his eloquence, maimed though it was by the ruthless hand of the reporter. The colour on her cheek became more vivid, her eye sparkled, and her voice grew deeper as she read; and when at last she had finished and had flung the paper aside, she stood silent and almost breathless—as pretty a picture of an orator who has just concluded one of his most successful efforts as the eye could rest upon.

“Why, I declare, Gladys, you read that wicked insolent stuff as if you really believed in it, and even liked it,” said Bertha, with some asperity in her tones.

“Not a bit of it, Bertha. I hate it as much as you do yourself. But you must admit that it is clever, and that it won't be easy to answer it. That is why I suggested that the wretch should be horsewhipped, if one could not reply to him.”

“Much good it would do to horsewhip him. Do you know that papa has heard that both the Fenwicks have called upon him? I think it disgraceful for respectable people to have any

dealings with men who are going about trying to make mischief, just to serve their own selfish purposes."

"But you see," said Gladys, "the Fenwicks must stick to their side just as we stick to ours. I don't suppose old Sir William would like that speech I read just now any more than papa will like it himself, especially coming from a tailor's son. But, then, it is a speech made on his own side, so he's bound to swallow it."

"Oh, as to this man being a tailor's son, do you know there is some mistake there, Gladys," replied Bertha. "The Fenwicks have told papa all about it. They say his father was a rich manufacturer of some kind—something in the iron line, I believe—at Birmingham; so that it is not quite so bad for poor papa as we supposed."

Gladys smiled scornfully. "Really, my dear Bertha," she said, "you are too nice in your distinctions. What in the world can it matter whether the man's father was a tailor or a tinker? Apparently he was the latter; but I do not see that it can make much difference to papa. In either case, I think the man himself is an abominable wretch, and most detestably clever, which is the worst of it. If they had only sent some one to Fanesford rather more like poor dear papa himself—I mean more of a gentleman and not quite so sharp as this Mr. Mansfield appears to be—it would have been so much nicer. You know how delightful it would have been after we had beaten him to have him here to dinner, just to have a good laugh over the whole affair. But I'm afraid there is no chance of that as it is. Papa would never let the tinker's son come inside the door."

"I should think not, indeed," cried Bertha with indignation. "I can't understand how you can even have dreamt of such a thing, Gladys."

Gladys, as usual, met the indignation of her sister with a burst of gay laughter. "I think the notion simply perfect myself; and, horrid as this man evidently is, I should certainly ask papa to invite him to the house if there were the least reason

to suppose that he was a gentleman. As that, unfortunately, is not the case, I fancy we must make up our minds to see nothing more of him after his defeat next week."

It will be seen from the foregoing conversation that in the minds of Miss Fane and her sister, at least, there was not the slightest uncertainty as to the result of the contest.





CHAPTER VIII

ELECTIONEERING TACTICS.



HANKS to the reforming zeal of the modern Englishman, we have banished the picturesque from our election contests. Time was when, between the discord of rival bands of music, the profuse display of the colours of the different candidates on house-top, window, and garment, the chairing of the successful aspirant to Parliamentary honours, and the bloody noses endured by some of the meaner champions of their respective parties, there were all the elements in even the humblest of English elections of an Odyssey. But the picturesque has been put down by Act of Parliament; the glorious confusion of the hustings and the nomination day has passed away for ever, and men walk as demurely to the ballot-box to record their votes as though they were going to church to say their prayers.

There were a great many persons in Fanesford in February, 1874, who looked with displeasure upon the abolition of generous and time-honoured customs by the ruthless hand of a reforming Minister, and who were inclined to visit with their

wrath. the candidate who represented the party which was responsible for the change. The gentlemen who spent their evenings in intellectual discourse over mugs of beer and long clay pipes in the Pig and Whistle, the Good Husband, the Fanesford Castle, and all the other minor houses of entertainment in the town—and like all old towns, it was liberally supplied with such places—discoursed nightly with ever-increasing indignation, of the sorry contrast presented by this particular election to those of former days.

“There’s owd Thomas yonder,” said Samuel Hare, the oracle of the “Good Husband” aforesaid, vaguely indicating a decrepit labourer who was smiling blandly upon the assembled company from the darkest and most uncomfortable seat in the chimney corner; “ask *him* what he thinks o’ this new-fangled way of doing things. Why, Thomas, owd chap, it worn’t like this, were it, when you were a boy?”

“You says right, Mr. Hare,” responded Thomas, in the quavering treble of extreme old age. “Eh, but, gentlemen, I mind when an election were a grand time. Why, i’ the great contest of 1818—aw wor nobbut a lad then—there were free victuals and drink in ivery house i’ the town for ivery man, woman, and child as liked to hev ’em for three weeks together, and never a question asked. That were when the Lord’s grandfeyther, owd Mr. Fane as we called um then, put up. He were a great Parliament man like the present one; and they do say King George the Fourth when he were crowned axed him to be sure and get a good place i’ the church, so as he might see well. He were a grand man, owd Mr. Fane, he were. Aw mind——”

“Ah, Thomas, never ye mind about Mr. Fane. Tell us some more about the election. Folks must have enjoyed themselves in those days, I should say; eh! Thomas, old boy?” said Mr. Hare, with the fine blending of familiarity and patronage which befitted a man who actually kept a shop when talking to a mere son of the soil.

“Aw should think so, Mr. Hare,” responded Thomas. “Why,

my feyther were that drunk for a month at a stretch that he wer'n't fit for a day's work afore Michaelmas Day, and the 'lection took place at Midsummer. Aye, an' my mother, too, poor soul, never got the better on't. She were a fine woman; but the liquor were too much for her, and she died that Christmas. Summat wrong in her inward parts, the doctor said. Yes," continued Thomas, meditatively, "folks *did* enjoy theirsels then."

"And now, Thomas," continued Mr. Hare, "I'll bet no one has asked you so much as whether you have a throat this time, let alone whether it might happen to be dry."

"Aw believe ye, Mr. Hare. Never a word o' that has man or woman said to me sin' this London chap came down."

"It's rascally bad. That's what I call it. Why, here is Mr. Fane, a gentleman as is a gentleman; and the law comes in and says as how he shan't stand even a pot o' beer out of his own pocket to owd Thomas yonder. It's a law agen' human nature; *that's* what I say it is," cried Mr. Hare, with awful emphasis.

"But ye see, gentlemen," struck in Thomas again, warmed by the sunshine of the shopkeeper's patronage, "it's no matter for me. Aw hev'n't a vote, ye see; so Mr. Fane has no call to stand beer to me. But it's different wi' gentlemen like yersels as has votes, and natterally look to get summat for 'em."

"Never mind," said the oracle of the tap-room, with an air of austere majesty. "If we don't send this fine gentleman back to London again wi' a flea in his lug, to tell owd Gladstone what Fanesford folk think of him and his notions, my name isn't Samuel Hare."

The chances of the Radical candidate, it will be seen, were not altogether brilliant in a borough in which the leaven of intelligent Radicalism was completely overpowered by the strength of old prejudices and traditions. If, indeed, Rex Mansfield had met with no opponents more powerful than the gentlemen who, like Mr. Hare, haunted the inferior public-houses of the town, he would have had no reason to fear the

result of the election. But the truth was that he had not been long in discovering that it is easier for the camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for one who is a candidate for Parliamentary honours to avoid giving offence, even where he least intends it.

Mr. Crisp, the shoemaker, for example, had devised in his own mind a scheme by which the great Fane influence was to be annihilated in this contest. And it must be said for Mr. Crisp that the scheme did credit at least to his acuteness. A man much given to poking his nose into the affairs of other people, he had been led to make those investigations into certain local institutions of which mention has been made elsewhere. He had been stimulated in his search by the fact that he had a personal grievance against Mr. Fane—one of those microscopic wrongs the very existence of which is unknown to the unfortunate man who is supposed to be responsible for them. Crisp had really made a strong case out, not against Mr. Fane himself, but against bye-gone generations of agents; and he was eager to make use of his discoveries for the purpose of turning popular feeling against the landlord in this election.

But to his great disgust Mansfield declined to have anything to do with the particular question which Crisp had made his own—at all events until after the election had been decided.

“Give me the papers, Mr. Crisp, and I’ll look into them, and see if any good can be done by taking the matter up; but you must distinctly understand that I shall not allow this question to be used during the contest. It has nothing whatever to do with it; and until the election is decided I shall not stir a finger in the matter.”

“But that means that you will clean throw the election away, sir. Really, sir, I must say I am disappointed—very much disappointed and surprised.”

“Probably, probably, my good friend. A great many people before you have been disappointed by me; and nobody, I can assure you, has been more disappointed than I have been myself. But, unfortunately for you, I never meant, when I

came to Fanesford, to allow myself to be used to pay off personal grievances against the man I was fighting."

Crisp preserved a sullen and impassive demeanour, though he fully understood the taunt contained in the candidate's words. His soul was full of bitterness, as naturally must be that of a man who sees that the revenge he has been nursing for long years in his secret heart is about to be foiled. He would have liked—ah! how he would have liked—to give this cool, off-handed person from London a piece of his mind. But to do so would be to lose his last chance of making Mr. Fane pay for those little wrongs the memory of which the wronged had cherished so long. With downcast face and dogged air he withdrew from Mansfield's presence, much to the relief of the latter.

Two days later, Mr. Fane, who was taking the election very much as a matter of course, having contented himself with making a single speech of inordinate length and dulness on the ungenial topic of highway rates, and the administration of the Poor Law, appeared at the dinner-table with a face that proved to the satisfaction of Gladys that the wind was very much in the east in his case.

He was not a man who made confidential friends of his own children. They were children merely in his eyes, and the notion of consulting them in any of those affairs of State in which he played a part that to his own imagination appeared so large, would never have entered his mind. But on this occasion he was disturbed and angry to an unwonted degree, and he allowed it to be seen.

Gladys, as usual, was the first to brave the storm that she saw was brewing. She made a shrewd guess, too, at the cause of her father's indignation, and chanced to hit the target fair in the centre.

"Have you seen those big yellow bills, papa, headed, 'Robbery of the Poor,' that are plastered all over the walls of the town?"

"I trust, Gladys," said Mr. Fane, with his stiffest air, "that

you have not allowed yourself to be seen standing at street corners reading electioneering placards."

"Oh dear, no, papa. I merely saw the top line of the bill as I drove through the town ; but a great many people seemed to be reading it, and the front of Crisp's shop was covered from top to bottom with copies of it. It looked more like a caravan in a fair than a decent house."

"It is monstrous, positively monstrous," said poor Mr. Fane, laying down his knife and fork, "that men will not be content to fight political battles like gentlemen." He was surprised to find himself talking to his children about anything connected with the election. But his soul was hot within him, and it was a relief to unburthen himself if it were only to his daughters.

"Has that man been insulting you, dear papa?" inquired Bertha.

"He has only charged me with having robbed the poor of Fanesford ever since I came into the estates," said Mr. Fane, grimly.

"Really this is more than a joke," cried Gladys. "The gentleman from London will have to be sent back to town with a horsewhipping to reflect upon during the railway journey."

"These are not days, Gladys, in which remedies of that sort are open to the aggrieved. But it is annoying, most annoying, to have matters of this kind brought into what ought to be a fair political battle. I have never been more insulted in my life ; and in my own town too !"

"A horsewhipping being apparently out of the question," said Gladys, "I should treat the creature with the contempt he deserves. Everybody in Fanesford must know that his story is a lie from beginning to end."

Poor Mr. Fane grew red in the face. He was perfectly conscious of his own innocence ; but he had read that fatal placard, a copy of which had been carefully forwarded to him by post. On first glancing over it he had been inclined to treat it with disdain. His life was before his neighbours and dependents. In his own eyes it had been a life of dignified

purity and righteousness, the very model of what the life of a man in his great position, as head of one of the oldest families in England, ought to be. His friends perhaps had hardly seen it in that light. That which he esteemed as dignity they privately regarded as dulness. But at least no man had ever suspected him of wilful wrong-doing towards anybody; and he could well have afforded to allow this placard to remain unnoticed, if it had not been for the fact that the charges it contained were stated with an unpleasant precision, and fortified by a reference to documents which undoubtedly existed.

As it was, even his first hasty consultation with his agent had convinced him that, whoever might be the person from whom Mansfield had obtained his information, it had at least the semblance of being well-founded.

"And I am afraid, Mr. Fane, that this is an awkward matter—a very awkward matter just at this moment. I hardly venture to hint at such a thing; and yet it is quite possible that in the excitement that prevails just now, this unfair blow may be very prejudicial to your chance of re-election." And Mr. Moffatt laid great stress upon the word "very."

"It is a knavish thing to have done; and a most contemptible, ungentlemanly trick!" cried Mr. Fane in his wrath. "If the man had possessed the feelings of a gentleman, he would at least have made me acquainted with his intentions. Surely he must know that I at least am innocent in the matter."

"My dear sir, that I am afraid will not make much difference with people of this description. If they see that they can injure a political opponent, they don't ask themselves whether the blow is a fair one or not. They strike at once, and their very hardest. That is my experience of your Radical gentry."

So Mr. Fane rode home to dinner with that face on which, as has already been told, the east wind was painted but too plainly. And as he passed through the familiar streets of the town to which his ancestors had given a name, he heard a sound which had hardly been heard there before—even at

election times—during all the centuries that the Fanes and Fanesford had lived side by side.

“Bo’o’oh !” cried a hoarse voice from the mouth of a dark alley ; “ Who’s robbed the poor ? ”

And it was with these words ringing in his ears that he took his seat at the dinner-table.

The meal was nearly at an end. Gladys, who had a healthy taste for the good things of this world, and was by no means inclined to despise the luxuries of a table such as that to which she was accustomed, was toying with a delicate confection of violet leaves, served up by the Fanesford *chef* in imitation of the well-known sweetmeat of the Riviera, when the butler entered and handed a letter to Mr. Fane.

That gentleman took it with some surprise. It was addressed in an unknown hand, and it had not passed through the post. It need hardly be said that letters are not usually delivered by hand after nightfall at country houses, unless they are of more than common importance.

Mr. Fane broke the seal and read as follows :—

“ Bull’s Head Hotel, Fanesford, Friday Evening.

“ DEAR SIR,—I have just seen with great displeasure and indignation a placard issued on paper of the Liberal colour, and apparently in the form adopted by my committee, in which a gross personal attack is made upon you.

“ I feel bound, without a moment’s delay, to address to you an emphatic disclaimer of any participation in the publication of this placard, of the contents of which I entirely disapprove. I look upon it as a most mean and unworthy attempt to injure you by making public facts which must tell to your disadvantage, even although you are—as I feel convinced is the case—personally innocent of the charges made against you.

“ If I believed that the publication of this placard was the work of my committee, and not of an individual, I should at once retire from this contest, which I have been anxious from the first to fight upon public grounds only. As it is, I feel it

due, both to you and to myself, to make you acquainted with the view I take of this act on the part of some one who professes to be a supporter of mine ; and I give you full liberty to make what use you please of this letter.

“ I am, dear sir,

“ Yours faithfully,

“ REX MANSFIELD.”

The girls saw from their father's face as he read the letter that it had some bearing upon the burning question of the hour. Gladys, in her secret heart, hoped that it might be some fresh insult from the Radical candidate so outrageous as to compel Mr. Fane to fight, not with horsewhips, but with pistols. Bertha, on the other hand, opined that the wretched creature had possibly repented of his misdeeds, and had written in abject terms to implore Mr. Fane's forgiveness.

When he had read the letter twice through with much deliberation, Mr. Fane took a very unusual course. He handed the document in silence to his elder daughter. In silence too she read it, and Bertha duly followed suit ; without a word being spoken.

When all had been made acquainted with its contents, the silence was broken and they discussed it freely. It was not satisfactory to any one of them. The writer, they one and all declared, had either gone too far or not far enough. Gladys, with characteristic impetuosity, took the view most unfavourable to Mansfield.

“ If the man really means what he says,” she remarked, “ why does he not retire ? He must know now that if he were to win—which, of course, is impossible—it would be through a disgraceful trick. What is the good of all his fine words ? ” she asked, scornfully. “ They are just the kind of thing that these men always write. They are glib enough with their pens if they aren't with their tongues.” She smiled as she spoke at the recollection of a very brilliant young writer for the press whom she had met in London, whose shyness had prevented

his uttering more than half a dozen words in her presence, though he was in the habit of daily inditing eloquent articles which were the delight of thousands of readers.

Mr. Fane, who had been at first impressed rather favourably by the letter, came round to the opinion expressed by Gladys ; and after a lengthened period of reflection in his own room, he penned an epistle of awful gravity and dignity to Mansfield—who used it for the purpose of lighting his pipe next morning—informing him that he had duly received his polite note, that he was much obliged to him for it, and that he observed with satisfaction that the sentiments of Mr. Mansfield with regard to the placard in question were those which would naturally be entertained by any man of honour.

Monday was the day fixed for the ballot. Crisp had timed the appearance of his placard in such a way as to prevent, as he hoped, any serious reply to it being attempted by the friends of the Conservative candidate. The only meeting announced for Saturday night was one at which Rex himself was to make his last speech before the election. It would be untrue to say that Mr. Crisp looked forward to this meeting with entire equanimity. He was bound to attend it, and in secret he entertained not a little dread of the manner in which he might be received by the candidate. He had, however, sufficient faith in the inborn selfishness of man to feel confident that Mansfield, now that the deed was done, would be willing to reap the profit accruing from it, even though he might desire to disclaim all responsibility for it.

But for once Mr. Crisp had made a miscalculation—a sad and unexpected one—in his estimate of the power of selfishness. When Rex Mansfield met his committee in the little anteroom adjoining the hall of the Mechanics' Institution the shoemaker was there, with a smile half bashful, half sinister upon his mean and puckered face. He was not a man to meet trouble half-way, and he went forward like the rest of the committee to grasp the hand of the candidate.

Rex passed him with a cold stare so stern and contemptuous

that it pierced even through the triple brass of Crisp's self-conceit. Those who were present saw that something was wrong; but they had discovered ere this that Mansfield was not a man with whom it was safe to take liberties. A pleasant, careless, and apparently indifferent person under ordinary circumstances, there were times when he developed an amount of internal heat, intensified by the coolly cynical outward manner which characterized him, that fairly frightened these simple country folk. So, whatever might be the cause of his strange reception of Crisp, they thought it better to leave him to reveal it at his own convenience.

Nor were they kept long in suspense. No sooner had the chairman of the evening introduced the candidate than the latter sprang to his feet. There was more of fire and enthusiasm in his manner than he had heretofore shown, and the crowded audience of friends and admirers greeted him with a prolonged roar of applause. It almost seemed, however, as though he were impatient of the cheers which broke out again and again. He looked like some strong swimmer eager to cast himself into the sea, and angry with the waves whose breaking delayed his plunge.

"My friends," he said at last, looking round upon the white mass of eager faces, with pale lips and flashing eye, "My friends, before I say anything of that great cause of which I am by your favour the unworthy champion in this town of Fanesford, I wish to say something about a matter personal to myself. Men of Fanesford, I stand before you to-night a dishonoured man. No act of mine has brought upon me the load of shame which I feel that I now bear. It has been the deed of one who called himself, and who perhaps thought himself, my friend. I shall not name him to you; and if, perchance, any of you should happen to be acquainted with his identity, I beg of you to leave him to himself. This man, anxious, I doubt not, to secure my return and the defeat of my opponent, has put forth a placard, which you have all read, loaded with accusations against Mr. Fane. Yes; I know that

the story told on that placard has brought about a strange revulsion of feeling in this town in my favour. I am told that there is not a taproom in Fanesford in which men's voices are not now all but unanimously raised in my support, where two days ago they pronounced against me with equal unanimity. But I stand here to tell you that the publication of this placard is an outrage upon decency, by which I, the candidate who is to profit by it, am publicly dishonoured. I say that so far as Mr. Fane himself is concerned, he is personally as free from all complicity in those perversions of public rights and public trusts which are revealed by that placard as I myself am; and I declare in the face of Heaven, that I would not only rather lose this election a thousand times over, but would rather be shut out for ever from public life, than see myself elected for Fanesford because men have chosen to make my opponent responsible for deeds which he has never committed. My one chance of regaining a clear conscience lies in making this statement in the face of you, the electors of Fanesford, and I implore you to believe that I mean all that I have said; and that, so far as I can help it, I shall not accept one single vote that any man may wish to give to me in consequence of the publication of this accursed placard. There is one further word I must say on this subject. When I was first made acquainted with the facts which are so ingeniously perverted on this placard, I told the person who had discovered them that if he would leave the matter in my hands I should inquire into it as soon as this election was finished, and see justice done to the poor of Fanesford. No; do not cheer," he added, raising a warning hand as a low burst of applause greeted this last sentence. "Let me finish what I have got to say. I must tell you now that everything has been altered by the publication of this placard. The question is now in the hands of Mr. Fane, and as an honourable man he may be left to deal with it. So far as I am concerned, I swear that, whether elected or not elected, I shall not raise even so much as my little finger in this matter. *That,*" he added, with bitter emphasis, "is all

that the author of this trick has secured by his direct defiance of my express injunctions."

Rex sat down amid a dead silence on the part of that vast audience. There were beads of perspiration on his temples ; but he wiped them away with a quick nervous gesture, and looked steadily towards that part of the platform where sat Mr. Crisp, green with the conflicting emotions that stirred his heart.

"Gracious heavens !" murmured Arthur Ponsford, who was sitting in the background. "Was ever such a Quixotic old fool as this sent into the world before?"

"He has lost us the election," was the low cry that ran round among the committee-men. And five minutes before they had all been so confident of success !





CHAPTER IX.

THE DEFEATED CANDIDATE.



EX MANSFIELD'S committee-men were quite right. His speech at the Fanesford Mechanics' Institution that Saturday night cost him his election. Popular feeling had been running strongly in his favour between the day when Crisp's placard appeared on the walls and the night of the speech. Mr. Fane's popularity, such as it was—and it had always been a popularity of a strictly limited kind—had waned with startling rapidity; and there was no doubt in the mind either of Tory or Liberal on Saturday morning that the chances were all in favour of Mansfield.

But that unlucky speech undid it all. Long before the hour for closing had arrived that night every public-house in Fanesford was ringing with denunciations of the mean and spiritless creature who did not know how to fight his own battles, and who even declined to profit by the blows struck on his behalf by others.

"I call it nought but impudence," cried the great Mr. Hare, as, with majestic mien, he aired his opinions in the parlour of

the Good Husband. "Just think of this Mr. Jackanapes telling us that it might be true as how we'd been robbed, but that he was too fine a gentleman to help us to our rights. Too fine! Why they do say as his father kept a shop the same as mine did."

"And I'm sure, Mr. Hare," quavered old Thomas from his seat in the chimney corner, "the way he have treated Mr. Crisp is what neither man nor beast ought to put up wi'."

"Yes, friends; thank goodness we have found um out in time. If so be as we must be robbed and sat upon by these Parliament folk, give me a gentleman to do the job. Now no one can say as Mr. Fane is not a gentleman."

"Aye, neighbour," put in another of the party, "who'd have ever seen the lord turning round upon one of his own friends as this chap did on Crisp. A low lot, I calls him."

And so all through the Sunday the chorus of disapproval was heard at street corners, at church-doors, in private dwellings, and last, but by no means least, in Mansfield's own committee-room, where the general feeling was that he had treated one of his chief supporters in a very shabby manner; and had proved himself wholly unequal to the honourable position which the burgesses of Fanesford had been minded to bestow upon him.

But—so curious are the chances of fate—there was one house where nothing had been heard of the sudden storm of unpopularity which had overwhelmed Mansfield; and that was the house where it might have been supposed the news would have been received with the greatest interest.

Lord Lostwithiel was over at Fanesford dining that Sunday night. It was his first visit since Gladys had said "No" to him, and he had come with no small degree of trepidation. The blow that had fallen upon him that sad afternoon in the park, though it had not left him without hope, had been a heavy one; and there was an unwonted gravity, and even timidity, in his air as he greeted Gladys in the drawing-room.

But Gladys, if on her side she felt any embarrassment at the

sight of the lover she had repulsed, at least showed none. All the shyness and awkwardness were on the side of the man.

"Don't you feel sorry, Lord Lostwithiel," she said, as they stood in the ruddy glow of the fire awaiting the summons to dinner, "that you are out of it all just now? I do think that to be a Peer is the very slowest thing going. Is it not your opinion also?"

"You mean because we are not allowed to take part in the elections? Well, I can't say that I quite agree with you, Miss Fane. It is all very well to have the excitement of it, you know, and that sort of thing; but after all it is pleasant not to be troubled by constituents and committees and speeches."

"What a shocking sentiment for an able-bodied Englishman to utter. And you know I don't believe you. It is my opinion that all Peers are dying to get into the House of Commons. The debates are so much more amusing there."

"Well, yes; perhaps they are," responded Lostwithiel, dubiously. "They may be amusing to some people who like 'em. They are dull enough to read, goodness knows. But after all, it is a comfort to be a member of a House that always rises in time for dinner."

"And that is said to contain more than one person who, if he had been born in any other rank, would have been shut up in a lunatic asylum," continued this terrible young lady.

"Really, Miss Fane, your attacks upon the chief institutions of your native land are so violent that I am beginning to think you must have been studying the speeches of our friend here—the tailor's son."

"Not the tailor's son, Lord Lostwithiel. We have actually ascertained that his father was a tinker; and I wish you knew the joy the discovery has afforded to Bertha. She no longer feels that papa has been personally dishonoured by being compelled to fight such a man."

"Is that so?" said Lostwithiel, apparently unconscious of the touch of satire in the voice of Gladys. "Well, I have no

doubt it must have been trying to your father to find himself fighting against that sort of man."

"But pray do not suppose," continued Gladys, "that any of my Radicalism comes from him. Have you not heard how abominably the creature has treated papa? Of course, he pretends to know nothing about it himself; but he'll profit by it all the same." And then Gladys told at full length the story of Mr. Crisp's circular.

It was hard upon poor Mansfield that he should thus be denied even the small amount of credit which he might justly have expected to receive in return for the sacrifice he had made. But in this world of dim perspectives, where the shadow and the substance are so constantly confused, men who perform Quixotic actions simply in order to relieve their own consciences, need not expect that any other recompense beyond that which they profess to desire will fall to their lot.

Lord Lostwithiel was staying at Fanesford for the night, and it was arranged that he should remain till the result of the polling was known the next day. Gladys would fain have taken some part in the work of the election, for her spirit had been stirred by the record of the more exciting electoral struggles of the past, and she was eager to distinguish herself, if it were only as a canvasser, among the humble voters of Fanesford. But it need hardly be said that Mr. Fane was not the man to encourage enthusiasm of this kind on the part of his daughters, and they were allowed no share in the fight such as it was.

There was no reason, however, why they should not show themselves in the streets of the town on the day of the election, and accordingly the well-known family carriage bearing the two sisters and Lord Lostwithiel was seen in the chief thoroughfares of Fanesford in the early afternoon. The election was virtually decided by that time. The ballot-box, of course, still kept its secret; but it was an open secret to everybody. At the committee-room of the Radical candidate, those who had supported Mansfield so ardently when he first appeared now

worked without spirit and without hope. As one of them expressed it, "the bottom had been knocked out of the tub" on Saturday night by the speech at the Mechanics' Institution.

There was little excitement anywhere save in the immediate neighbourhood of the polling-booths, where curious crowds gathered to see the voters come to the ballot. It was a tame and colourless proceeding, and old Thomas was bitter in his complaints of the contrast it presented to the gallant fights of sixty years ago.

Mansfield himself, when the consciousness of his defeat was brought home to him, gave no outward sign of the depression of spirits which undoubtedly possessed him. He was not a man who wore his heart upon his sleeve, and he made his little jokes with his friends, and talked with Ponsford as freely as usual. The last-named gentleman, it must be said to his credit, had completely cast aside the affected dandyism of Savile Row. Was he not fighting for the good cause? he said to himself, in extenuation of his conduct, when, for the twentieth time during the course of the day, he shook hands with some unwashed gentleman whom he had been deputed to convey to the ballot-box.

Rex would have been only too happy to be left to himself. With his pipe and a copy of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which had arrived opportunely, he would have been tolerably happy, even though he felt his defeat with a certain amount of soreness. But peace of this kind was not permitted to him. It was his duty, so his committee assured him, to make himself conspicuous in the streets, to show himself at the various ballot-stations, and to prove to the Fanesford electors and the world at large that he was not afraid of the result of the contest. So, sorely against the grain, he found himself patrolling the streets with an attendant henchman or two, followed by a small knot of boys, who alternately cheered and groaned at him.

It was in the midst of one of these aimless perambulations that he encountered the carriage of the Fanes, which at the moment had just quitted the door of Mr. Fane's committee.

room. A great crowd of the general public had gathered there—for your general public has a wondrous aptitude for discovering the winning side—and the occupants of the carriage as they drove off had been followed by a lusty cheer, in the very ring of which there was the assurance of victory. The face of Gladys glowed with excitement; even the paler features of her sister were flushed. Rex, conscious of his humble following, felt for a moment slightly abashed as he encountered the well-appointed carriage and its fair occupants, and his perturbation of spirit was scarcely lessened by the fact that, being detected by the crowd, he was saluted with a storm of discordant yells.

The shouts of the multitude attracted the attention of Gladys, and she saw by whom they had been provoked. A sudden impulse mastered the girl. The next instant she felt vexed with herself and ashamed of what she had done—vexed and ashamed when it was too late to recall that hasty and unpremeditated action; for in the excitement of the moment she had greeted Mansfield with a marked bow, and a smile in which malice and triumph were equally mingled.

A faint gleam of surprise passed over the countenance of the Radical candidate as he observed the girl's action. But instantaneously he uncovered and returned her smile with another, which had at least the advantage of being free from either pique or exultation.

It was well for Gladys that the horses were fleet and that their heads were turned homewards. She was dimly conscious of the fact that even Lord Lostwithiel's good-humoured countenance was darkened by an expression of pained amazement as he sat opposite to her; and her sister's exclamation of "Oh, Gladys! how could you?" had not passed unheard. But it was not what her companions thought of her that really troubled her most. The full significance of what she had done, the cruelty of the insult which, in a moment of rash impulse, she had offered to a beaten man, almost overwhelmed her with shame and contrition. What lurking devil within her

was it that had tempted her in this way? How could she have been weak enough to succumb to an impulse so unworthy? Though she kept an unmoved face under the eye of her sister and Lord Lostwithiel, the girl fairly groaned inwardly in her vexation and humiliation. She hated the man to whom she had thus exposed herself. The grave good nature with which, in returning her salutation, he had ignored the insult which it implied, increased her rage against him and against herself. The one comfort she had was in the thought that she would never meet him again; that from to-day their paths in life would lie wholly apart. Yet even this comforting thought did not stay the vehemence with which she upbraided herself for that momentary indiscretion; and when she reached her room, she flung herself upon the couch in something like an agony of self-abasement.

Perhaps if she had known how Rex regarded her action, her distress might have been to some extent assuaged. Naturally he had been surprised by the incident, and for a moment he had found himself wondering whether patrician dames and damsels, of whose ways he had small experience, allowed themselves thus to make sport of those whom they regarded as their foes. But at the next instant, with a twirl of the ends of his thick moustache, with which he was in the habit of playing in moments of perturbation, he had dismissed the subject from his mind as altogether unworthy of consideration.

No one greeted more eagerly than Rex did the arrival of the hour of four, when the hopeless struggle of the ballot came to an end. Then followed the collection of the boxes, and the counting of the papers in the quaint old Town Hall. Here were gathered the leading men of both parties. Most of them were, of course, acquainted with each other. The Radical candidate felt himself to be a stranger and intruder amongst them, and the feeling was strengthened by the way in which his own friends kept aloof from him. They could not forgive him for having, as they believed, thrown away his chances.

Fortunately for himself, he had a power of mental detach-

ment not commonly to be found among selfish mortals. His personal interest in the contest he felt was at an end. He had been beaten, and there was an end of it. But why upon that account need he feel less interest in the process of counting the votes? It was the first time that he had ever been present at an election by ballot. He saw that a good review article might easily be made out of the scene he was witnessing, and almost before he was aware, he was watching the work of counting, not with the absorbed self-consciousness proper to a candidate, but with the keen interest of an intelligent and thoughtful spectator.

He was disturbed in his close observation of the operations of the returning-officer by the voice of one of his supporters.

"Mr. Mansfield, Mr. Fane would like to be introduced to you. May I have permission?" and before he could say a word the introduction had been effected.

The quondam rivals shook hands heartily, as is the fashion among Englishmen who have fought. Rex was a little amused at the manifest condescension of Mr. Fane; but he thought within himself that, after all, a settlement of seven centuries would account for a good deal in the manner of a landed proprietor.

The two talked for a few moments upon indifferent topics—the weather, the news of the day, the antiquity of the Town Hall. They talked, in short, upon any subject save politics. Then suddenly Mr. Fane cleared his throat and plunged into what was evidently a set speech.

"Mr. Mansfield, I feel that I must take the first opportunity that has been afforded to me of expressing my sense of the honourable manner in which you have conducted this contest. I was not aware until a few minutes since of what had occurred at your meeting on Saturday night. You will, I trust, not think me guilty of an impertinence, when I venture to thank you for the courage and candour with which you defended me then against an unworthy attack. I only hope that on your side you do not feel that you have any cause of complaint against me or my friends."

Rex was more than a little annoyed at the fact that the episode of Saturday night should have been alluded to at all. He had some curious prejudices, and amongst them was an intense hatred of praise of this kind. As he heard the smooth and well-considered words of his successful rival there was bitterness in his heart.

"I think, sir," he said, "some one must have given you an exaggerated account of what occurred then. I merely disclaimed responsibility for an act of which, of course, any gentleman must have been ashamed."

Mr. Fane's face grew slightly darker. "I only felt, Mr. Mansfield," he replied in a cold tone, "that I ought to let you know that I was aware of the manner in which you had behaved."

"And you will allow me, on my part," said Rex, with an air of studied coolness, "to congratulate you upon what is the evident result of the election."

His rival bowed with stiff condescension. "You are too kind," he said, in his least conciliatory manner. "It is a pleasure, however, to have to fight a contest of this kind with a man of honour."

If Rex had not long before mastered the old Adam in his nature he would probably have uttered some unpleasant expletive in his anger at the grand air of patronage assumed by Mr. Fane. As it was, he merely murmured an inarticulate word of acknowledgment.

"And will you add to the favours you have already conferred upon me by dining with me to-night?" continued Mr. Fane, with a smile of conventional politeness.

"Thank you, very much," responded Rex, who felt as though he would be glad to knock this proud man on the head. "I am afraid, however, my engagements will scarcely permit of my having that pleasure."

"Well, another time—or perhaps in London, Mr. Mansfield," said Mr. Fane, perceptibly relieved at the refusal.

But at that moment there was a stir in the little group round

the table at which sat the returning-officer, counting up the totals of the voting papers. It was evident that the decisive moment was at hand. The Tory candidate approached the table with an air of conscious self-possession. Rex was inwardly cool enough now; but he was somewhat disturbed by the thought that perhaps the people around him believed him to be nervous and agitated.

"Silence!" cried the Deputy Town Clerk of the little borough; and all in the room remained perfectly still.

Then the Mayor, whose duty it was to officiate as returning-officer, solemnly rose, and announced the result of the election, Mr. Fane had received 724 votes, whilst 341 had been given for Rex. It was a crushing defeat. There was a loud shout of triumph from the Conservatives, and great hand-shaking with the re-elected Member. Then some one shook hands with Rex and told him not to lose heart; there might be better luck next time. Then above the tumult he heard the voice of Mr. Fane moving a vote of thanks to the Mayor; and then he was conscious that he himself was seconding the motion, and speaking with perfect coolness and self-possession. But it was all like a dream to him. He hardly knew how he got out of the hall into the dark street, where the crowd were hurraing frantically, as though not one of them had ever cheered the Radical candidate or desired his success. Ponsford had seized his arm, and he was led by him by rapid steps to the Bull's Head, where dinner and a budget of letters awaited both.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that Rex Mansfield was one of those nervous, self-absorbed men who feel that the whole universe is out of joint if they happen to have the tooth-ache. He was ordinarily a very cool and somewhat cynical person, who looked at life through the medium of a not inconsiderable experience, and who had long ago made the discovery that there is no more unprofitable occupation in existence than that of crying for the moon. He was an easy-going, tolerant philosopher, in short, who had done what so many philosophers forget to do, and had applied his theories

to his own private sensations. To-morrow he would laugh over the whole story of his abortive candidature for Fanesford, and would find plenty of scope in its incidents for those semi-satirical tales of real life with which he was in the habit of entertaining his friends in the club smoking-room. But for the moment the sensation of having been beaten, and beaten so very thoroughly, was not quite a pleasant one. He showed no unmanly weakness under it ; but he had to confess to himself that he felt it more than he had believed it was possible for him to do.

His companion, when they sat down to dinner, had resumed the style of Savile Row in its fullest and severest perfection. "Thank goodness there is no more hand-shaking with the unwashed to be done," he murmured, as he took his seat, and then he busied himself with the perusal of the letters which the evening's post had brought.

"Hullo !" he exclaimed, as he cast his eye rapidly over one of the epistles, "here is something interesting and *à propos*. It is from dear old Jack Haviland. Just listen to this, Rex. 'Tell Mansfield that I hope he will be Member for Fanesford by the time this letter is in your hands. I know something of Fane, and I don't like him. His airs are quite intolerable, even though he has the best blood of the country in his veins. I don't suppose you will have seen anything of "the Gipsy Queen" during your sojourn in Fanesford. The Gipsy Queen, my dear Arthur, was one of the reigning beauties of last season, and she is the eldest daughter of Mansfield's antagonist. They say that there is a strain of Bohemian blood in her, inherited from some remote ancestress who played the very dickens among the dull respectabilities of the family, and who even lighted her own funeral pyre by burning down the hall and herself in it. This young lady is decidedly original, and unless I am mistaken will make her mark in the world. But if what I hear from my cousin Lady Bilton is correct, I imagine that the poor girl is about to have rather an unpleasant time of it. Her father is going to marry that dreadful Lady Jane

Craigallen, old Greymore's youngest daughter, who is the chief light of the orthodox section of female society. I don't know any one in the world who could stand Lady Jane as a step-mother; and it will be interesting to observe how long she and the Gipsy Queen are able to live under the same roof. Happily, the girl can always marry Lostwithiel, who has been over head and ears in love with her ever since she was a baby. They tell me that Fane, who is mortally afraid of his daughter, has not even told her of his engagement; but I can hardly believe this to be true."

Rex was interested in the little narrative. It recalled vividly the bright face of the girl whose mocking salutation had startled him in the street that afternoon. As she had passed him he had thought of her as one of those gay butterflies on whom the sun is always shining, and in whose lot none of the bitter ingredients of the cup of life are mingled. "Poor shallow trivial thing!" was the idea which had flashed through his mind after she had passed out of sight, "what a life yours must be! A life devoid of care, or sorrow, or pain! Well may you seek relief from the intolerable ease in which your soul is lapped in even the most frivolous of amusements." And now he knew that across the brilliant sunshine of her path this dark shadow was already gathering—all unseen by her.

"Poor girl!" he said, in the deep full voice which both men and women loved to hear. "She does not strike me as being one who will submit tamely to such a stepmother as Haviland describes. I'm afraid there is trouble ahead for her. It is something worse than the loss of an election."

"But probably it is not true," said Ponsford; "Haviland knows a great deal of that sort of people, of course; but half the gossip he retails usually consists of lies."



CHAPTER X.

LADY JANE.



ALTHOUGH Gladys knew it not, that moment at which she made her mocking bow to Mansfield marked the first great crisis in her life. There is no delusion more widespread among civilized men and women than that which takes the form of a belief that poor humanity knows exactly what it is doing at each particular moment in its journey from the cradle to the grave, is always making deliberate choice of the path which it take. We do not cross the Rubicon now-a-days with its playing, colours flying, set faces, and determined hearts. Rubicon! We do not even know when we have taken one step that can never be retraced. In nine hundred ninety-nine cases out of a thousand, our Rubicon is no d river across which we can only force our way of set ose and with the fullest knowledge, not only of what we doing, but of all that is involved in the step we are taking. a tiny grass-grown rivulet, so narrow that we scarcely note fact of its existence. We cross it at a single bound, in a ent of heedlessness, or folly, or infatuation, and not until

long after the deed is done do we awake to a consciousness of what it really means.

It is not to be supposed that the mere pain felt by Gladys when she reflected upon her conduct toward the beaten candidate would of itself have sufficed to change the current of her life. For the moment she was abashed and mortified at the thought that she had acted in a way which was certainly not worthy of her ; and after the manner of women, when they are angry with themselves for having treated a man badly, she turned no small portion of her anger against the unfortunate Mansfield himself. But a pleasant chat at the dinner-table or a night's sleep would have been quite sufficient to restore her mind to its usual state of equanimity. The idea that, at that moment when after smiling in mockery at Rex she found Lostwithiel regarding her with eyes of wonder and reproach, she was saying good-bye to the happy, heedless days of her girlhood, never for a moment occurred to her. If any one had suggested it she would have turned the notion into ridicule. But none the less was it true.

The dinner party at Fanesford that evening was not quite what might have been expected at the close of a successful contest. The butler, it is true, had sought to do special honour to the occasion by bringing forth certain wines which were only put upon the table on gala days ; the housekeeper, too, had provided a more elaborate *menu* than usual ; and there were one or two guests in addition to Lord Lostwithiel. But a certain air of gloom seemed to hang over the feast. There was none of that pleasant gossip which usually flows so freely at a banquet which celebrates the close of a hard-fought battle. Mr. Fane almost seemed anxious to ignore the Fanesford election, and even Mr. Moffatt, who was one of the party showed no disposition to dwell upon it. The master of the house talked pompously and solemnly to the guests of inferior degree regarding the prospect of Mr. Gladstone's resignation and the formation of a Disraeli Cabinet. Lord Lostwithiel and Harold entertained each other with dull quarter sessions

and hunting-field chatter, and the girls seemed to have lost their tongues. This was, indeed, a mood almost habitual with Bertha, who never spoke at table more than good manners seemed to make absolutely necessary. It was, however, a new condition in which to find the gay Gladys, and both Mr. Moffatt and Lord Lostwithiel felt some surprise at her silence and manifest depression.

Probably she was surprised at it herself. She did not believe that any opinion which Mr. Rex Mansfield might entertain regarding her could trouble her for a single moment. And yet she still felt stung as she thought of that reckless act of indiscretion in the carriage, and more than once she saw rising before her eyes the manly figure of the defeated candidate whom she had so persistently sought to turn to ridicule. She was glad to plead a headache and go to bed directly the guests from the town had left the drawing-room.

The next morning was one of the most miserable even of that dull month of February. A heavy fog swathed the park in its grey folds, and a fine drizzling rain fell steadily. It was clearly a day on which no outdoor exercise was possible, and Gladys, in resigning herself to a long morning indoors, felt that her spirits were already at zero. Little did she think that before night came she would look back upon the frame of mind in which she rose that morning with the envious yearning with which men and women, whose peace has for ever been destroyed by some sudden stroke of fate, regard the happy time in which they sported in ignorance of the blow that was about to fall upon their heads.

For once Mr. Jack Haviland, to whom Arthur Ponsford and the other young gentlemen of Savile Row, were chiefly indebted for their knowledge of what was passing in society, had been accurately informed. Unknown to his daughters, Mr. Fane, in his mature age, had engaged himself to one who was equally mature, the Lady Jane Craigallen, youngest daughter of the venerable Earl of Greymore. What had led him to make such a choice it is impossible to say. He would be a foolish man

who sought to account for the marriages even of those who are nearest to him in kin. Mysterious as the ways of Fate usually are, there is no matter in which the mystery is more profound, the problem more completely beyond solution, than in the choice which men and women make of their partners in life.

Why Mr. Fane should have decided upon marrying again was not a question in answering which there was much difficulty. The simple truth was that he had felt during the first season of Gladys in town all the inconveniences of being the father of a pretty girl who had attracted not a little of the notice of society. He had no time, he told himself, to act as chaperone to his daughter. His country had always demanded his first thoughts ; and as it was inconceivable to his mind that England should continue to exist if Mr. Fane ceased to interest himself in her affairs, the idea of giving up public life in order to devote himself to his family did not even occur to him. For the sake of Gladys and Bertha it was clear that some lady must be found who was willing to take charge of them in society, and to conduct all those troublesome negotiations which Mr. Fane believed to be inseparable from love, or at all events from marriage.

Moreover a shrewd notion had formed itself in the worthy gentleman's head that unless he took some measures for bringing his eldest daughter under more direct control than any which he was able to exercise over her, that young lady might some day take a startling step wholly at variance with the traditions of the family. Even he, though by no means a man of quick perception, had been unable to shut his eyes to the fact that Gladys was altogether original. She said and did things that would have shocked him in any other girl, and which appeared to him to be even more shocking in her case than they would have been in that of any one who was not the inheritor of such a name as hers. She was fond of slang ; in London she had consorted, in defiance of his injunctions, with the fastest set in the great world, with the women whose names studded the pages of so-called society papers, and over whose daring exploits young men waxed merry in club smoking-rooms

of an evening. Pride, far more than paternal affection, made him feel a dread almost amounting to horror of the bare possibility of his daughter's name thus becoming public property. That Miss Fane of Fanesford should have her photograph exhibited in the shop windows of Regent Street, and her charms extolled in the columns of newspapers, was a thought too terrible for the poor man to face. He felt that he would rather see his daughter in her coffin than see her cutting such a figure in life as that made by some of those whom she had recently been able to count among her friends. And yet he could not blind himself to the fact that matters were tending fast in this direction. He was compelled to own that his own control over Gladys was of the slightest, and that the proud spirit of the girl was proof against his authority. "If she would only marry Lostwithiel," he said to himself, groaning inwardly as he thought of the step he had resolved to take, "all might be well. She might chaperone her sister herself then, and Lostwithiel would look after her. But there seems little chance of that," and so the poor man resolved to marry, lest a worse thing should happen unto him.

But why Lady Jane Craigallen? Ah, there's the rub. Why did Jack marry Betsy, or Phillis fall in love with Corydon? When it began to be rumoured in society that Mr. Fane was about to marry again, and that Lady Jane was the favoured woman, all the dowagers wagged their wise heads and declared that he had made a very sensible choice. The old gentlemen, the husbands, brothers, and cousins of the aforesaid dowagers, did not look upon the match in that light. On the contrary, some of them used very emphatic and even naughty language in denouncing the folly of a man of Fane's good sense in tying himself up to one whom they went so far as to describe as "a spiteful prying old she-cat." As for the young people, the children and grandchildren, the nephews and nieces of these dowagers and elders, they did not, it must be confessed, betray any very lively interest in the affair. To One-and-Twenty it seems nothing less than an act of impertinence for

Fifty to pretend to be in love ; and the sweet juniors look down upon amorous old fogeydom with a contempt the depth of which is literally unfathomable. Yet, though generally the rising generation regarded Mr. Fane's marriage as a matter altogether unworthy of its notice, when it did condescend to notice it, the opinion expressed was not favourable to the wisdom shown by Mr. Fane in the choice he had made.

Lady Jane Craigallen was a woman renowned in society for the strength of her convictions upon every question on which it is possible for men to be of different minds, and for the ardour with which she devoted herself to good works. Verging on fifty, she looked younger than her age, thanks to her waxy complexion and the light flaxen hair with which Nature had endowed her. She was tall and thin ; her voice was clear and penetrating without being shrill, and her blue eyes—the blue of the turquoise, not of the violet—were admitted by friends and foes alike to be remarkable. She could have looked without blinking into the heart of a blast-furnace, and she did look every day with those pale cold eyes of hers into the faces of men and women who detested her without betraying the slightest consciousness of the fact that she knew herself to be detested.

There was nothing vulgar about Lady Jane. She never raised her voice even when engaged in the hottest controversy ; she never used slang or strong language ; she always dressed with good taste, and her manners were irreproachable. Yet none the less did she act upon any mixed society in which she chanced to find herself as a kind of social iceberg—freezing up all the generous impulses that at times stir most human hearts, and withering with her wintry glance every tender little shoot of sentiment, every innocent act of youthful frivolity, that chanced to come under her notice. She was much admired by the dowagers because of the soundness of her sentiments upon all subjects of human interest from theology to slang. But the young fled from her in affright, and knew her, even afar off and at the first glance, for an enemy.

There was no one in all England who disliked her more thoroughly than Gladys did. They had met at a country house where the girl found herself thrown among some congenial friends of her own age and sex, and where naturally her high spirits found free play. The dull respectabilities in the house were rather shocked at the frivolity of Mr. Fane's daughter. That the girl was good and pure and generous, and that her heart abounded with kindly emotions, was admitted by everybody. But that she was frivolous and light-headed all were compelled to acknowledge; whilst her fatal affection for laughter, her love of turning everything and everybody to ridicule, could not be denied even by her firmest friends.

It was Lady Jane who took it upon herself to subdue the wild spirits of Gladys, so long as they chanced to sojourn together under the same roof. And she succeeded! None could guess how that miracle was wrought. Least of all had Gladys herself any notion of the truth. She only knew that this woman seemed to be able to freeze the very laughter not only on her lips, but in her heart. More than once she tried a pitched battle with Lady Jane, feeling confident that she could rout her. But her Ladyship declined the challenge, and she did so with a cold dexterity that even Gladys was forced to admire. "If only the woman," she thought to herself, "would do something that one could laugh at, or turn into ridicule; if she would only be awkward, or vulgar, or grotesque, like most of the goody-goodies one has known, there might be a chance of meeting her on fair ground. But she never commits herself."

The end of that little country-house campaign, which had been fought in the autumn before the election, was that Gladys had parted from Lady Jane Craigallen with a feeling of un-mixed relief and delight, as from the one woman in the world who seemed able to master her proud spirit, and to subdue the strongest impulse of her nature. And this was the woman whom Mr. Fane was about to marry!

It was after luncheon on that dismal day on which Gladys

had awoke in such low spirits that Mr. Fane made the momentous communication concerning his intentions to his daughters. It was a painful and embarrassing time for the man himself. Probably no father in this world ever felt at his ease when telling his daughters that he was about to present them with a new mother. It is certain that the eloquence which had so often exercised a soothing influence upon the House of Commons—between the hours of 8 and 10 p.m.—was never more sorely taxed than it was upon this occasion.

But at last the unfortunate man succeeded in making the unwelcome truth clear to both his daughters. With pale faces and beating hearts they realized the fact that he was about to be married again, and that into the home in which they had so long led their happy, uncared-for, and careless lives a stranger was to be admitted as its mistress.

"I should have told you of my intentions earlier," said Mr. Fane, gathering confidence now that the ice had been broken; "but as you will both, I am sure, admit, my time has been too fully occupied by public affairs during the past three weeks to permit of my entering upon any matter of merely domestic interest. My dear Bertha, I am sorry to see you shedding tears. I should scarcely have expected it of you," he added, severely, glancing at his younger daughter as he spoke. "I am glad, however, to find that you, Gladys, receive my communication in a proper spirit."

It was true that the irrepressible tears were trickling down the cheeks of Bertha, and now that her father addressed her in these tones she began to sob convulsively. There was no answering sign of emotion on the face of Gladys. The proud, dark eyes seemed to be fixed upon some point far away in the uttermost abyss of space, the beautiful lips were firmly closed, the noble brow was as white as marble. She hardly betrayed a sign of life, much less any outward and visible symptoms of the passion that possessed her soul.

There was an awful silence in the room, broken only by the sobs of the younger sister. Mr. Fane looked from the one to

the other in obvious embarrassment. Nothing could have been more evident to any disinterested spectator of the scene, if there had been one, than that the unfortunate man would willingly have made any sacrifice to have been allowed to escape instantly from the apartment.

It was Gladys who first found her voice. In low, husky tones that her father caught with difficulty, she murmured these words—

“Who is it?”

“I really wish, Bertha,” responded Mr. Fane, his face growing red, “that you would restrain the violence of your feelings. Pray take example from Gladys, who, on this occasion, is showing so much good sense.” Bertha stifled her sobs in her pocket-handkerchief, and having wiped her tear-stained face, turned toward her father with a look of eager expectation. The eyes of Gladys were now fixed upon the floor; but the heaving of her chest showed what that outward mask of calm really covered.

“I can assure you that in the choice I have made I have thought of your interests far more than of my own. No doubt I might have married some one quite young” (Gladys could not repress the sharp shudder which ran through her frame as she heard the words), “but I have done nothing of the sort. I have endeavoured to secure as my future wife one who will not only make a suitable mistress of this house, but who will be a wise and affectionate mother to both of you, in whom I trust, she will find kind and dutiful children. It is Lady Jane Craigallen whom I am about to marry.”

A sharp cry of pain and horror rang through the room. Even the dull and hide-bound soul of Mr. Fane was pierced by that shriek as it burst from the lips of his elder daughter. The next instant Gladys, with her arms twined about his neck and her lovely face upturned toward his, was clinging to him passionately, and crying in accents of wild beseeching—

“Oh, no! papa! not that woman! not Lady Jane Craigallen! You cannot mean it. You cannot know her. Say

that you were only joking. Say it is any one—any one in the world—no matter how young—but not Lady Jane !”

A scene like this was something quite new in that family of a thousand sober traditions. As Mr. Fane strove to disentangle himself from the lithe arms of his daughter, he saw a white face in which not alone horror, but something strangely akin to sheer terror, was depicted, close to his own. He could not identify the features of his daughter in that strained and anguish-smitten mask. He had seen nothing like it save on the stage, he thought. And as the idea crossed his mind, it filled him with so great an indignation at this desecration of the sanctity of his hearth, that it gave him strength to free himself from the fierce, wild grasp of his daughter, who sank into a low chair at his feet.

“Gladys, this is altogether beyond endurance,” he stammered forth. “I cannot understand your feeling in the least, and your way of showing it is most objectionable. You ask me if I am joking. Joking, forsooth !” Like most angry men, he gathered courage at the sound of his own voice. “I beg you to understand that I am to be married to Lady Jane Craigallen immediately after Easter.”

And then he hastily left the room ; where one of his daughters sat shedding silent tears, whilst the rigid form of the other, as she lay in the low lounging chair, seemed like the figure of one struck by the hand of death.





CHAPTER XI.

MY LADY'S BOUDOIR.



HERE is something sacred as well as terrible in the first great sorrow of a young soul. The time comes—alas! that it should be so—when disappointment and even death become commonplace to most of us; when we have got used to the grief of parting, to the bitterness of those feuds which spring up like the sudden tornado of the Southern seas, no one knows whence or how, and in their fury drive kindred souls for ever far asunder; a time when there is nothing strange even in the farewell kiss of a death-bed, nothing new even in the tears that fall upon the freshly planted grave. But that first great grief of the young soul which brings home to it the lesson that life is made for something else besides enjoyment or self-indulgence, is of all the strokes of fate that which seems to wound most sorely, to stun and confound most utterly. There is so much of bewilderment mingled with the suffering! The victim feels as a man might under whose feet the solid earth itself has crumbled into dust, upon whose head the very heavens have fallen. It is as though the whole order of nature had been

reversed in this special case, and a blow inflicted for which the wide universe itself in all its story affords no precedent. The young soul cries out in its sore trouble; and yet it feels that the trouble of itself would not be so hard to bear if it were not for the stress of amazement and indignation which sways the heart at the same moment.

Through the long hours of that sleepless night Gladys lay tossing on her bed in a fever of pain and passion. She had been too young when her mother died to feel that sorrow in its full intensity. And her little life had run since then in a smooth and swift-flowing current, ruffled only at her own pleasure by the freaks of impulse to which she was subject. Set far above the reach of those ills which are associated with poverty, and with the life of toil and struggle to which the vast majority of mankind must submit, she had nursed all unconsciously the delusion that the common griefs of humanity of which she read in books, and of which occasionally she saw some signs among the people around her, could have no part in her lot. Death was a mere name to her; a something which she knew would some day in the course of nature cross her path, but which lay so far away that it had no more real existence for her than had those stars which formed the faint track of the milky way on which her eyes rested for a moment as she looked up to the heavens upon a winter's night. Common people, poor people, vulgar people had to do with death and with all its horrible paraphernalia of mutes, and mourning coaches, and red-eyed weepers in the churchyard; but for her, with her veins full of bounding life, it could have no concern.

And so, too, in those other sorrows of which she read or heard, there was nothing that came near enough to touch her heart. Others might have to experience bitter changes, and cruel strokes of fortune; but her own life was fixed in a happy security, and no alteration in her lot, save that which she herself might will, had ever come within the scope of her imagination. The old house where she had played in childhood, where she had grown into that glad womanhood upon which

L

she had just entered, the house in which all her wishes had been consulted and her will had become as law, would continue to be her home, without change of condition, until she herself chose to leave it at her own good pleasure. To-morrow was to be as all the yesterdays had been—a day free from care or trouble, and in which the one task laid upon her soul was to be that of pleasing her own self.

This was the theory of life as it had formed itself in her untutored mind—a life of ease, of laughter, of freedom from every cause of sorrow and vexation! And now in a moment the whole fabric had come crashing down upon her head. She felt as though some mighty storm had swept across her life and made it desolate for ever, with all its pleasant garden-places laid waste, its fair perspectives blurred and ruined, its happy system reduced to chaos. Even those who condemned the girl's heedless frivolity with most severity would have had pity on her then, if they could have seen with what agony and bewilderment her soul was filled.

The thought that any other woman, a stranger, should come into that house and take her place was hateful to her. It was one that had never entered into her mind before. That her father should remain as he was had seemed to her as certain as that the old ford across the river should continue to be commanded by the grey ruins of the castle. The notion that some one else should make her home here, should go in and out, usurping her place at the table and in the household, stepping between her and the grave father whom she loved, and even, perhaps, seeking to impose new laws and restraints upon her, was one so strange that she could not realize it. But her whole soul rose in bitter and passionate rebellion against it.

Yet this was not, after all, that which troubled her most. It was the thought of who this woman was that seemed to crush her to the very earth. It has been told how Gladys and Lady Jane had met, and how the former had found herself, for the first time in her proud and imperious life, conquered when she came into collision with the latter. There seemed something

terrible beyond the power of words to express in the thought that *this* woman had been chosen by her father to be his wife, and—oh! cruel mockery of language—the mother of his children. If it had been any one else, poor Gladys thought, as her fevered body, robbed for once of the sweet sleep of peace and innocence, tossed upon the bed, she might have borne it; but how was it possible to endure a fate so cruel as this!

For long, long hours of misery she lay with dry eyes, and parched lips, weighed down as by some hideous nightmare; and when at last sleep came to her relief, it brought with it a special burden of its own, for in twenty feverish dreams she saw herself struggling with a fiend who wore the shape of Lady Jane Craigallen, and who, with crafty tongue and cruel hands, seemed bent upon bearing her down into some fathomless abyss of ruin and degradation which was yawning at her feet.

It is easy to smile at the exaggerated apprehensions of a girl who was threatened with no greater evil than the entrance of a step-mother into her home. But upon such a girl as Gladys a heavier blow could hardly have fallen; and the suddenness of the catastrophe seemed to give its terrors tenfold weight.

For days and weeks after that revelation the rooms and corridors of the old house never echoed with the gay laughter which had formerly made music everywhere. Gladys went about pale, silent, and defiant, yet oppressed by a sensation closely akin to physical terror. Bertha, too, was brooding and unhappy; but it was not in one of her temperament to suffer long, and her tears had been dried, and her smiles had re-appeared long before the shadow on her sister's face had grown less marked.

Mr. Fane, though quite conscious of the state of his daughter's mind, was not courageous enough to remonstrate with her; still less did he venture to take her frankly into his confidence. It was not his way, nor the way of his family. Besides, if he had felt ever so much inclined to talk openly with Gladys on the subject which interested them both so

deeply, he would not have dared to do so after seeing the manner in which she had received the announcement of his intentions in the first instance. If there was one thing in the world which a Fane disliked more than anything else it was a "scene;" and the unhappy man was still thrilled by a strong sense of personal indignation, as he thought of the terrible moment when his daughter, clasping him round the neck with almost frantic violence, had shrieked forth her incoherent appeal to him not to marry Lady Jane. Nothing more distasteful to a Fane, nothing more likely to wound his feeling of personal dignity, could possibly have happened; and he felt that it would be long before he could forgive her for that unseemly outburst.

So, with that commendable prudence which is more common in men than in women, Mr. Fane went to London by himself when Parliament met, pleading various reasons, more or less imaginary, for leaving his daughter at home. So far as Gladys was concerned, there was no occasion for any of his far-fetched apologies. She had no wish to go to town; for she knew that Lady Jane Craigallen was there.

A bitter morning came when the old housekeeper, with tearful eyes and agitated manner, conveyed to the daughters of the house the fact that she had received a letter from Mr. Fane, stating that the boudoir which had been fitted up for his first wife when she came as a bride to Fanesford, and which had been the favourite sitting-room of the girls as long as they could remember, was to be entirely redecorated and refurnished for the use of Lady Jane.

To such a girl as Bertha this seemed the most cruel and bitter of wrongs, and her tears flowed afresh at the announcement. Upon Gladys it had no such effect.

"Let me see my father's letter, Mitchell," she said, in low, cold tones such as the poor woman never remembered to have heard issuing from those lips before.

She read the letter through with care, and then, still holding it in her hand, said, "I see my father does not choose to trust

me in this matter. All the instructions are given to you, Mitchell; but I suppose I may still be allowed to take some interest in the changes that are to be made in the house—even though they are only intended for the benefit of Lady Jane.”

“Oh, Miss Fane! Oh, my dear!” sobbed the housekeeper, who, it need hardly be said, sympathized entirely with the girls in their view of the impending change. “Don’t speak like that. It makes my heart ache to hear you.”

A faint smile for an instant broke forth from the cloud that rested on the face of Gladys.

“I think, Mitchell, you ought to be pleased to find that I am not quite such a ‘frivolous girl’ as I was a short time ago. Don’t you remember calling me that just before the election? But never mind my chaff; and don’t cry. Leave that to Bertha,” she added, with a touch of something like contempt in her tone. “I suppose, in spite of the way in which papa has ignored me, that I am still his eldest daughter, and still mistress of this house. In a few weeks I shall have to abdicate; but until then I don’t mean to allow even you, Mitchell, to take my place; so if you please, when the work-people come for orders, you will let them see me. I shall look after all this myself.”

And she was as good as her word. She had great taste. No Fane for several generations had been gifted as Gladys was. In her the rich artistic temperament of that remote foreign ancestress of whose personal character but a few vague traditions remained had been revived, and the girl showed a delight in the pride of the eye such as no native-born Fane had ever displayed before. In her dress, in the arrangements of the rooms which she took under her charge, in the massing of varied colours in the conservatories, she adopted fashions such as were strange at Fanesford, and wholly out of keeping with the commonplace surroundings of the spot, but which yet were the talk and the admiration of the whole county.

“Fane’s girl,” bluff Sir William Fenwick would remark, “dresses like a French Duchess, and has a love of colour that

would do credit to an Italian artist." Sir William had travelled in his youth, and was still regarded as an authority on foreign ways and tastes.

It was as an artist rather than as the eldest daughter of Mr. Fane that Gladys now undertook the superintendence of the work by which the boudoir—the old-fashioned simplicity of which, she reflected with bitterness, had been deemed good enough for her mother—was to be made fit for the coming mistress of the house.

Bertha marvelled at the zeal with which her sister devoted herself to the task, and marvelled all the more inasmuch as Gladys had strictly forbidden any intimation of the fact that she was engaged in it being made to her father. But this did not trouble the elder daughter. With set face, the soberness of which contrasted pitifully with the gaiety of old, she went about her work as though it absorbed all the energies of her soul. The worn, old furniture which she knew so well, and which had always been invested in her eyes with a certain degree of sanctity because it was associated with faint memories of her dead mother, was removed from the boudoir and carefully, almost tenderly, placed in the schoolroom. Gladys could have wept when she saw her mother's work-table, with the intricate recesses of which her very earliest memories were connected, removed from the spot where it had stood so long. But with stern self-command she saw it taken away, and contented herself with carefully dusting it with her own hands when it had reached its new resting-place. Strange indeed is that subtle chain of ideas which we call association, and which thus brings even the paltriest of articles of furniture, a chair, a table, a carpet, into intimate connection with the tenderest feelings of the heart!

But when nothing was left in the familiar room that spoke of its past, the artist passion in the girl's soul took full possession of her. She designed the decorations of the walls, she decided the colour of the curtains, the shape of the chairs, the pattern of the carpet; and at last, after some weeks of incessant

thought and labour, she saw the result in a boudoir which a princess might have been proud to own—and which, indeed, no princess could have obtained unless something more than mere money, the genius of a real artist, had been expended in its preparation.

Mitchell and the servants of the house watched the progress of the work in mute amazement. What miracle was this, they thought to themselves, by which the proud, mirth-loving, impetuous, passionate Gladys of old had been subdued into this steadfast, silent girl, who had created all this beauty and splendour for the gratification of the woman who was about to supplant her by entering the house as its mistress?

If the problem had been submitted to Gladys herself she could not have solved it. She only knew that, in those days in which she struggled alone in that wilderness of temptation in which all human souls must pass through their sore conflict with evil, she would have perished if there had been nothing to distract her attention from the miserable present, and the still darker future which was drawing near with rapid footsteps. The very knowledge that she was lavishing all this care and trouble and taste for the benefit of one whom she regarded as an enemy, one whom she both feared and despised, seemed to inspire her to increased exertions: and so long as anything connected with her task remained undone, she did not allow the tension of nerves and spirits to be in the slightest degree relaxed.

But when the work was accomplished, when the boudoir was ready for the new mistress of the house, the inevitable reaction came. Gladys fell ill; and before long her case was so serious that Bertha felt bound to summon her father from London. It was then within a few weeks of the date fixed for the wedding, and the parliamentary and official duties of Mr. Fane—for, as a matter of course, he had received an appointment in the new Ministry—were very heavy. Nothing could have been more inconvenient to him than the journey to Northumberland at such a moment. But Bertha's summons

was not to be resisted, and so he went down to Fanesford—it is to be feared in no amiable mood, so far as the daughter whose illness had made his presence necessary was concerned.

But when he saw the white face and wasted features of Gladys he was seriously alarmed; for, after all, he loved his daughter as well as he was capable of loving any one in the world. He could not reproach her, as he had meant to do, for having allowed herself to be attacked by illness at such a time; and he found himself caressing her with a tenderness to which she had been a stranger since the days of her early childhood.

It was, however, when Bertha, in defiance of the injunctions of Gladys, had exhibited to him the triumph of taste and industry presented by the newly furnished boudoir that his change of temper was made complete. Poor soul! for once even the reserve of the Fanes was melted by the proof he thus imagined that he had received of his daughter's love and repentance. He assured her again and again of his appreciation of her kindness; he declared that Lady Jane would feel even more moved by it than he himself was, and he lavished words of praise, which were rarely heard on those proud lips, upon the genius displayed by his daughter in the work she had accomplished.

It puzzled him not a little to observe the manner in which Gladys received his unstinted thanks and commendation. There was no answering warmth of affection on her part. On the contrary, a veil seemed to be drawn over those unfathomable dark eyes as he spoke—a veil of cold, proud, stubborn reserve. It was only when he praised her skill and good taste as an artist that the old light came back to them, and a faint tinge of colour returned to the girl's fair cheeks. He satisfied himself, however, with the explanation that she was ill; and never troubled himself with fears that her reconciliation to his marriage was not complete.

And so one morning toward the close of May, a gay and numerous wedding party were assembled in St. Peter's, Eaton

Square, to witness the marriage of Mr. Fane and Lady Jane Craigallen. Gladys had recovered sufficiently to be able to be present; and she and her sister stood behind the elderly bride at the steps of the altar.

Neither man nor woman in that great company had any eyes for Lady Jane, though it must be admitted that she looked wonderfully young and handsome for her years. It was upon the tall, slender figure, and the matchless face of Miss Fane that the universal attention was centred. There was that about the girl which commanded admiration at all times; but as she stood now, in a dainty costume of brown velvet, with stately air and a face of proud and cold self-reserve, it was impossible even for the most indifferent to fail to be struck by her beauty. All round her were fair-haired Fanes, for the family had mustered in force to do honour to the marriage of its chief. She seemed an alien and a stranger among that company of smooth, well-dressed, well-mannered, pleasant-looking men and women. She might have been some captive princess from the South or the East, brought into a British shrine to be offered up as a sacrifice to the gods whom the pale-faced islanders worshipped. And there was that in her face which seemed to strengthen the fancy. She stood there, in very truth, as though it was the sacrificial altar which rose before her, and she were its destined victim.

Many a man and woman in society wondered that day how Miss Fane and her father's newly made wife would get on together.





CHAPTER XII.

A SOIREE AT THE CYCLE CLUB.



ONE sultry Saturday night in the June of the year following that marriage scene in Eaton-square, Mr. Arthur Ponsford might have been seen sauntering down St. James's Street accompanied by one or two of his chosen friends from Savile Row. They were all in evening dress, these young philosophers and revolutionists, and if the passer-by had taken notice of the cut of their clothes, he would have seen that their tailors, at least, had nothing with which to reproach themselves. It was about ten o'clock, and therefore high noon in club-land. But Arthur and his friends passed the brilliantly lighted buildings, the names of which are familiar to every country cousin who spends a week in town, and turning into sober Pall Mall, quickly disappeared from the ken of the watchful policeman at Marlborough House in the darkness of a narrow side-passage. Here they paused before a door, and Arthur rang a bell, or at least pulled a bell-handle of ordinary appearance. Instantly the door opened, as though some magic watchword had been uttered. The visitors passed through it, and then it closed noiselessly and of its own accord.

There was a sound of many voices in an upper room—the sibilant sound of the English language as it comes in a strange murmur of r's and s's when spoken by fifty different tongues at once. Mingled with this babble of talk there were one or two other sounds—the clink of glasses and the popping of corks—which seemed to suggest that the conversationalists were not averse to tempering the severity of their language with a little wine or zoedone. Ponsford and his friends hastily scaled the old-fashioned staircase, and pushing open a door, entered the hot and crowded room from which these sounds proceeded.

It was one of the famous Saturday evening soirées at the Cycle Club to which they thus introduced themselves, and in the company of men and women, whom they now encountered, at least a score of faces familiar to the outer world might have been recognized. There were many ladies, most of them, alas! with faces seamed with the lines of care and thought; though here and there the bright, fresh features of some young girl afforded a pleasant contrast to the wan, worn visages around her. There were not a few young men of the Ponsford order, faultlessly dressed, and manifestly inspired by the heroic determination to prove that it is still possible to “make the best of both worlds”—to dress and eat and talk like men of fashion, whilst posing and thinking like philosophers. But far more interesting to the stranger than these smooth-faced, carefully dressed youngsters, the majority of whom were connected with one or other of the great newspapers, were the elderly men who abounded in this company. There was hardly one of them who had not “done something,” and whose name was not familiar to the general public.

Here were painters whose works were even now delighting the visitors to the Academy. It was hard to believe that yonder sallow, lean, wrinkled man, in the ill-fitting coat, who was listening with such deferential attention to the talk of an elderly spinster dressed in something amazingly like a faded bed-gown, was the great artist who made the hearts of dwellers in the town leap with sudden joy as they drank in all the

freshness and beauty of the springtide, or all the tranquil pathos of the autumn woodland, when they gazed upon his magic canvases ; but perhaps it was still harder to understand how the stout, commonplace, red-cheeked youth who was sipping whiskey and potass water could be the painter to whom the world was indebted for those ideal portraits of lovely women which were threatening to change the standard of female beauty even in conservative England.

And there were writers here, too ; great novelists, whose books had been translated into all the languages of Europe, and whose names were as familiar in lonely farm-houses on the spurs of the Rocky Mountains as they were here in Pall Mall ; poets who were really recognized and read, as well as other poets who, like Mr. Ponsford, had to rest satisfied with the recognition of their own limited little coterie, whilst they fed their ambition upon dreams of an enlightened and penitent posterity ; vigorous essayists and journalists, the crack of whose whip, when it sounded from the columns of a newspaper, no system of anonymous writing could prevent being recognized ; political economists, whose learned disquisitions were supposed to affect the intentions of statesmen ; and social reformers, whose lucubrations were given to the world chiefly through the medium of penny magazines. Doctors, barristers, a sprinkling of Members of Parliament, several younger sons of Peers and one real live Lord—a Lord, moreover, of mark in society and letters—completed the motley company who buzzed about in little groups in that quaint old club-room, wherein, according to tradition, Dame Eleanor Gwynne once held her Court of Love.

“Ah ! Ponsford ; you are here at last. I have been wanting to see you all the evening. Have you seen Mansfield since he returned ?” The speaker was the Hon. John Haviland, commonly called Jack, a younger son of Lord Haviland, and a prominent figure at every gathering of the Cycle Club. Like most of the men who were connected with that interesting association, Jack Haviland was a pronounced Radical, with a

burning hatred of the rights of primogeniture and a theory of his own on the land laws. It was not, however, for his views on English political questions that he enjoyed most credit among his brethren of the Cycle. Jack's distinguishing *métier* was connected with the affairs of Europe at large; and his views on Continental politics were, it must be confessed, astonishingly liberal for a man of his education and rank. The exiled Communists who flocked over to London in 1871 had found no firmer friend than Jack, who had pleaded the cause of the most notorious of *pétroleurs* in half the boudoirs of Mayfair. It followed that you seldom met Mr. Haviland without being introduced to the latest and most interesting specimen of the Anarchist fraternity. Common rumour had it, indeed, that Jack's valet, a well-trained individual who presided over a neatly appointed suite of rooms in the Albany, was instructed when relieving his master's guests of their coats in the little antechamber, to invite them to deposit with him for the general comfort and security of the party any specimens of hand-grenades or samples of dynamite and nitro-glycerine which they might chance to have in their pockets. For the rest, Jack was a man who unquestionably moved in good society, and who might have cut a figure in Belgravia if he had not shown his preference for the bypaths of that refined and decorous Bohemia which now flourishes in the midst of us.

"Mansfield! has he come back?" said Ponsford, with a pleased voice. "The last I heard of him, he was in Bucharest."

"Ah, that is nearly a month ago. He has been knocking about since then in the Bukovina, picking up no end of bric-a-brac, and notions for his new book. I heard he had got back to town two days ago, and I felt sure he would be here to-night. I want to introduce him to a friend of mine he ought to know. By the way, Ponsford, let me introduce you to my friend. Bessarion, this is Mr. Ponsford, a particular chum of mine, a poet, and a good revolutionist; Ponsford, the Prince Bessarion."

Prince Bessarion had been picked out by Ponsford the

moment the latter entered the room as being at once a stranger, and by far the most striking-looking man in that company, in which there were not a few striking faces. Above the average height—so tall, indeed, that he could be seen towering above the heads of most of the men around him—he was yet so perfectly made that there was no suggestion of ungainliness in his figure. It was clear cut, and moulded on the lines of a Greek statue. There was something Greek, too, in the “faultily faultless” features of the man. The face had that tint of lustrous pallor that is never found among Englishmen. Nothing could have been more charming than the effect produced by the jet-black moustache and well-trimmed beard against the marble paleness of the skin. Ponsford was an amateur of good looks in men as well as women, and when “Haviland’s newest Communist,” as he mentally christened the stranger, bowed and smiled in acknowledgment of the introduction, he took real pleasure in noting the beautifully white and regular teeth which the smile disclosed, the perfection of all the man’s features, and the sweetness and suavity of his somewhat melancholy and pathetic expression.

“Bessarion is a native of Cracow, and I expect Mansfield must have met some of his people there, so I am anxious to bring the two together,” said Haviland.

“Been long in town?” inquired Ponsford of the Prince.

“I am arrived this week,” replied the latter, speaking English with the greatest readiness, though with a slight accent. “I have been in a little trouble in my country, and so I remain here for the present. Only for a short time,” he said, with a pleasant smile. “The politics are mixed just now, very mixed, in my part of the world. They will arrange themselves quickly, I expect, and then I shall return. Meanwhile it is a pleasure to me to meet my old friend Mr. Haviland, and to make the acquaintance of this agreeable company.”

“I met Bessarion five or six years ago at Rome; at the Doria’s, was it not?” said Haviland.

“If I mistake not, it was either at Prince Doria’s or Prince

Colonna's. They are both good friends of mine. But, my friend, did I tell you that as I came by Paris I called on the Duke?" and Bessarion named a very great man in the French political world.

"Ah! so you saw the dear Duke again. It seemed to me when I met him at Biarritz in the winter that he was breaking up—poor old fellow. I hope you did not think him much changed for the worse, Bessarion?"

"So far from it, I thought him looking better than ever, and looking forward more eagerly than ever to the time when he will take the Presidency. But who knows! For my part, I prefer the chances of Gambetta. I saw Gambetta——"

So far Prince Bessarion had gone in this talk in which great nobles and world-renowned statesmen figured so largely, when he saw that the attention of both his auditors had been suddenly diverted. A new-comer had entered the club-room, one with whom the reader has already made acquaintance, and both Haviland and Ponsford were eager to greet their old friend Mansfield.

Rex seemed very little changed in outward appearance since the day, nearly eighteen months before, on which he experienced the bitterness of defeat at Fanesford. Perhaps, if any one had regarded the powerful, quiet face with the close scrutiny of love, a few lines might have been detected to-day which were not there a year ago; nay, here and there, in the thick, brown hair, a white thread might, perchance, have been discovered. But these things would only have revealed themselves to the jealous eyes of affection; and though Mansfield had many friends, there was no one, so far as the world knew, so deeply interested in him as to be able to detect these light footprints of the flying years.

He shook hands with Ponsford and Haviland in the undemonstrative fashion of Englishmen who love each other well and who meet after long absence. If Prince Bessarion had not been made familiar with the ways of the cold-blooded islanders, by frequent sojournings in Rome, Nice, and other

cities favoured by the patronage of travelling Britons, he would hardly have dreamt that these calm, cool men, were friends meeting again after the lapse of months.

"So you have not succeeded yet in getting yourself killed ; eh, Mansfield?" said Haviland. "I hear you had a narrow escape when you crossed the Balkans. Is that so?"

"There are wonderful stories being told here, I find," replied Rex, in the deep voice which was so well known to the others. "If I may believe all that has been told me since I got to town, I must have passed through adventures equal to those of Baron Munchausen or Sinbad. What a pity it is that my journey was really a very dull one. If it had only been what people say, it would have been so much more exciting when put into a book."

"Mansfield will never rest satisfied till he has got himself killed in some romantic fashion, and in some utterly unapproachable part of the earth. If I were you, Ponsford, I should be getting up materials for his biography betimes. It strikes me he has a particularly 'fey' look to-night. I should not wonder if he has really received his death-blow during this last trip. What do you say, Mansfield? Were the fair dames of Bucharest too much even for a misogynist like yourself?"

"Ah, I thought of you, Jack, more than once whilst I was staying at Brofft's Hotel. It is a wonderful place, Bucharest, but decidedly more suitable for a pleasure-loving bachelor like yourself than for such a grim old fogey as I am."

During this short conversation, to which he had been listening intently, Prince Bessarion had been waiting for the promised introduction to Mansfield. When it had been duly made, the Prince expressed the pleasure with which he found himself in the presence of a man so distinguished in political circles, both at home and abroad, as was Mr. Rex Mansfield.

Rex did not receive this compliment with effusion. He knew that something more than the authorship of a few review articles was needed to make a man really distinguished, and it has already been told that he hated praise of this kind. It was

with much reserve and coldness that he responded to the homage which was offered to him by the Prince.

"Yes, I was in Cracow for a week," he said presently, in reply to a question from Haviland. "But I don't think I met any one of the name of Bessarion. Judging by your patronymic, you are certainly not a Slav, Prince?" he added, abruptly.

"Ah, no. I cannot pretend to Slavonic blood; but my mother's family was one of the oldest in the kingdom of Poland, and many generations of my ancestors are buried at Cracow."

Ponsford was much interested in the Prince, as he was in any new social or political lion who happened to come within his ken; and he was glad to entertain him whilst Rex received the congratulations of his friends on his safe return from the somewhat adventurous journey in which he had been engaged during the past six months.

"I suppose we shall have you here now for the autumn, at any rate," said Haviland. "You must have had enough of travelling for some time to come."

Rex shrugged his shoulders. "My dear Jack, travelling is like dram-drinking. Provided a man has a constitution equal to it, the more he has of it the more he wants. For my part, I am firmly convinced that one of my ancestors was either the Wandering Jew or the gentleman of cork-leg celebrity. The 'wages of going-on' seem to me to be those best worth earning in this world."

"Upon my word, Mansfield, you are a strange creature. I don't wonder that your friends find it difficult to make you out. Some day or other, however, you will settle down at home, I hope, and make use of your splendid chances here."

Rex smiled rather bitterly. "Splendid chances, indeed," he said; "I have not yet discovered them."

"Oh, but you have; only you have no sooner discovered them than you have thrown them away. There was that affair at Fanesford, for example. What man in the world but yourself would have sacrificed the absolute certainty of a seat for such a fellow as old Fane?"

"Old Fane, as you call him, seemed to me to be a very respectable, dull gentleman, with a very pretty daughter. By the way, I have heard nothing of either father or daughter since he married that old lady whom you used to detest so bitterly. I hope she has not broken the girl's heart—as you seemed to think would be the case."

"Broken the heart of the Gipsy Queen! No, it has not quite come to that yet," said Haviland, cynically. "If you asked anybody in society, I imagine you would be told that the young lady had gone a long way nearer to breaking the hearts both of her father and her step-mother. Have you not heard? No; of course, you have been dallying among the rose-gardens of Roumelia, or listening to the music of the Tsigani on the Chaussée at Bucharest, instead of doing your duty as a good citizen in London during the season. If you had been at home, you would have known that the young lady whose father owes his seat in Parliament entirely to you, has been the talk of the town during the last six weeks."

"Nothing serious, I hope," said Mansfield gravely. He was not a man who could make a jest of a woman's reputation. Haviland favoured him with one of those lively and expressive gestures which he had acquired in the course of his prolonged association with French and Italian patriots.

"No; you need not look so solemn as all that, old man. Probably all the talk is merely founded upon the fact that Miss Fane's portrait by our friend Hicks there"—and he indicated the red-cheeked young man of whom mention has already been made—"is the great success of the Academy. Of course, you have not seen it yet. When you do, you'll agree with me in thinking that it is too lovely for anything. The Prince, they say, has ordered a *replica*. I must ask Hicks if it is true."

"And the girl's head has been turned, I suppose, by the flattery," said Mansfield.

"*Quien sabe!* You know what women are, Mansfield. No; I forgot. You know nothing about them. But if you ask our friend Ponsford here what he thinks of Miss Fane, I have no

doubt he will tell you, as most young men would, that she is a charming creature and a heartless flirt, who is fair game for any man who has courage to try a fall with her. That she is a flirt I am well aware. That poor young Fenwick—son of Sir William, you know—is said to have gone completely to the bad in consequence of the way in which she has treated him ; and she has behaved almost as badly to other men. The only one of her friends who has a good word for her is that simple old duffer Lostwithiel. But he has been hopelessly in love with her for years. A flirt ! Yes, there's no mistake upon that point. But I am not so sure about her being altogether heartless ; and upon the whole, I am also not so sure that she is winning the desperate game she is playing against her wretched old hag of a stepmother. She goes everywhere, you know ; and since people began to talk about her portrait she creates a sensation wherever she is seen. They were positively standing on chairs to look at her at Manchester House the other night. And a very brilliant and remarkable young woman she is ; but my private opinion is that she is intensely miserable ; and although the world would laugh at the notion, I am inclined to think that it would be safe to back that puritanical old Lady Jane against her stepdaughter for power of resistance to the heart-breaking process."

"And Mr. Fane?" inquired Rex, who was interested in spite of himself in the little story. "He did not appear to be a man who would like to see his daughter made the talk of the town."

"Ah, you are right there. They tell me that poor old Fane has the most miserable face on the Treasury bench. Even Dizzy's is a joke to it. I have no doubt that between wife and daughter he leads a shocking life at home. By the way, I forget whether you met Miss Fane when you were down fighting her father. I see her often ; so, if you are friends, I shall be glad to report your return."

"Many thanks, but you need not trouble yourself, Haviland," said Rex, quickly. "I have not the pleasure of knowing the young lady ; though I happened to see her when I was at

Fanesford. I have no great love of women such as you describe her as being. Indeed, I sometimes think that a professional flirt would be all the better if some matron of unblemished reputation were empowered to box her ears occasionally, just to give her a faint notion of what the pain she is so fond of inflicting upon other people is."

"Aha! my grave and venerable friend," laughed Haviland. "There is no need to ask where you have been travelling. You have come back to the enlightened Occident impregnated with the brutal theories regarding women which prevail in the barbarous Orient."

"I have certainly come back less prepared than ever to fall in love with the present style of Englishwoman," replied Mansfield.

"Of course; of course. I knew it. And somewhere on the lower reaches of the Danube a fair Eastern bride awaits the return of the philosophic Rex. Is her name Zuleika, may I ask?"

But Rex did not respond to Haviland's characteristic piece of chaff. He merely laughed in thorough good temper, and changed the subject.





CHAPTER XIII.

LADY JANE'S "SYSTEM."



AND was it true? Had the sweet Gladys Fane, whom we have seen speeding her way through the opening years of maidenhood with the careless grace of a young fawn; whom we have seen, too, bewildered, stunned, and pained in that first experience of sorrow which is the starting-point in the real pilgrimage of life, degenerated into the vain and frivolous woman of the world, with no thought but for the gratification of her own vanity, no higher wish than to drown reflection in the vulgar dissipations of a life of pleasure?

This was what the world said of her; but the world, as we know, sometimes misjudges the men and women on whom it deigns to cast its eyes. Haviland had not been malicious in the report he had made to Mansfield of the present position of Gladys; she was making a name for herself in society. People were talking of her beauty, of her wit, and alas! of her daring disregard of the edicts of Mrs. Grundy. There could be no doubt in the mind of anybody who had known her in earlier life that she was no longer the Gladys of old days. To

the many she was the very picture of high-spirited defiant loveliness ; but for the few who read her more correctly, the ring of her laughter, often as it might be heard, was no longer what it once was, and beneath the brilliant smile there lay the shadow of a heart at perpetual enmity with itself and with fate.

When Lady Jane Craighallen became the wife of Mr. Fane she entered upon her new task with the fixed resolve that she would "do her duty." There had been no illusion on her side with regard to the motives that had led Mr. Fane to make her his wife. Love, such as schoolboys and schoolgirls know, had nothing to do with it ; and she was heartily glad of the fact, for throughout her life she had regarded sentiments of this description with a profound contempt. But she was invited by a wealthy and honourable man, head of one of the oldest families in England, to preside over his household and to take charge of his daughters ; and this invitation, after due reflection of a placid kind, Lady Jane had accepted, regarding it—as she told her intimate friends—as a manifest call of duty, which it would have been sinful to neglect.

Lady Jane's fashion of hearing that dread voice of duty to which we all pay so much of outward deference, was the common fashion of mankind. If instead of being one of the richest commoners in England, Mr. Fane had been a poor clergyman, with threadbare coat, who was looking for a mother for his motherless girls, it may be doubted whether Lady Jane would have had the faintest intimation from on high that it was her duty to respond to his invitation. But Fanesford was a noble old place, and the town house in Wilton Gardens was unexceptionable. Lady Jane had always secretly entertained a hankering after a house on that favoured spot. What, then, could be more evident than the direction in which duty beckoned her ? Of this fact, be it said, without any attempt at sarcasm, which is utterly wasted upon persons like Lady Jane, she convinced herself absolutely ; and if love had no place in her heart as she stood at the altar on that June morning in 1874, a strong sense of her own virtue, and of the

solemnity of the step she was taking, undoubtedly possessed it.

Perhaps, too, there was a certain amount of zest in the feeling with which the newly made wife looked forward to one portion of the task that lay before her. It has been told how Gladys and she had met in a country house in the previous year, and of the bitter antipathy of the girl toward the woman. The feeling had been common to both. Lady Jane, who could not help viewing with a certain amount of admiration the brilliant figure of the high-spirited girl, had seen in her one of those daughters of vanity whom it was her mission upon earth to reclaim. She was known among her friends as the mistress of an infallible system by means of which many a poor young creature of aristocratic family who threatened to give trouble to her parents had been reduced to submission. Her services had, indeed, been eagerly sought for by at least a dozen noble households blessed or cursed with madcap daughters; and so far had her fame as a tamer of such sinners gone, that the nickname privately applied to her by the irreverent young gentlemen of White's and the St. James's Club was "Miss Rarey."

She had tried her system upon Gladys during their temporary sojourn under the same roof, and she had failed—failed more completely than she had ever done before. It is true that she had struck a feeling of something like terror into the very heart of the girl. But Gladys had not allowed any one to perceive this. So far as her outward manner was concerned, the only effect of Lady Jane's intervention was an aggravation of those characteristics which were most objectionable. Gladys left that country house at the close of her visit to all appearance a wilder, more reckless, and incorrigible girl than she had been when Lady Jane first came in contact with her.

Mr. Fane's wife was not without ambition, though possibly the ambition was not of a sort to commend itself to the admiration of the world at large. She saw in Gladys Fane a foe who was worthy of her steel, and the house in Wilton Gardens itself had not exercised a stronger influence upon her mind in

leading her to the serious step of marriage, than had the prospect of a campaign in which this proud, disdainful spirit was to be driven to acknowledge all the merits of the infallible "system," and the superior virtues of its inventor.

"A very pretty room, a very pretty room, indeed, my dear Gladys," said the bride when they met for the first time in the boudoir at Fanesford. "No, my dear, not 'awfully jolly.' Slang words of that kind belong to the vulgar, and have no right to be heard in a room like this, in the decoration of which I am glad to see good taste has reigned supreme. Give me my fan, my dear, and draw that curtain a little further; the sun is troublesome to my eyes."

Gladys obeyed without a word. Her bearing toward the new mistress of the house was coldly courteous. Lady Jane was no fool, and she perfectly understood that this was not a girl who would either relish the effusive affection of others or display any on her own side. This was her first day at Fanesford; she had not yet even looked round the house, but some inward conviction assured her that she would not be allowed to be mistress of the place without a battle, and, like a skilful general who is conscious of his own strength, she felt that her best policy would be to attack at once.

"Sit down here, my dear," she said, indicating a low chair close to the couch on which she was reclining. Every fibre in the body of Gladys seemed to assert itself against such a command uttered in the room in which she had so long been absolute mistress; but she obeyed without a word.

"Your father and I have, of course, been talking over a great many matters that concern you and the other children whilst we have been away, and as you are the eldest as well as the most intelligent, I think it right to tell you first of all what we have decided upon." Lady Jane patted the shoulder of Gladys with gentle affection when she had uttered these words, and apparently waited for her to speak. But Gladys sat in dumb expectancy, marvelling as to what it was that this strange woman and her father had "decided upon."

"He agrees with me," continued Lady Jane, in a clear, silvery voice, "that several things ought to be changed in the house. For example, I find that the housekeeper is not at all a suitable person for such a position. Her age and other things would of themselves convince me upon that point; but there is no need to go into such matters. I have been shocked to learn that she is a Dissenter. It is deplorable that such a person should have held a place of trust here during so many years. One may hope, however, that no permanent evil has yet been wrought by her. But obviously she must leave at once."

"Do you mean Mitchell, Lady Jane?" cried Gladys, in dismay. "Surely you do not mean to send the poor old soul away because of her religion."

"Yes, Gladys; that is just what we have decided to do."

"And did papa agree to this, Lady Jane?" said the girl, in tones of rising anger. "Oh, I am sure he cannot have done so. I beg your pardon, I don't mean to be impertinent, but I cannot believe that papa really means to send poor Mitchell away. Why she was housekeeper before mamma came, and has looked after all of us ever since we were babies."

"My dear Gladys," said Lady Jane, speaking just as clearly, as coolly, and as decisively as before, "I must beg of you not to raise your voice when you speak to me. It is not usual for young ladies to do so when they address women who are older than themselves, to say nothing of women who happen to be in the position of mothers to them. I told you that your father and I have decided to part with Mitchell, and so far as that is concerned there is an end of the matter. If either I or your father had wished your opinion on the subject, we should, of course, have consulted you before our decision was taken. That we have not done so is due in part to my wish that you should be spared what I foresaw would be the pain of having to assent to such a step as the woman's dismissal."

"I will go to papa myself, Lady Jane, and hear what he says," cried Gladys, rising in haste and agitation. She had been prepared to hear that many changes in their mode of life

were to be introduced by the new-comer ; but she had not dreamt for a moment that the first change of all would be one which involved so much as the removal of Mitchell from her place of trust and authority necessarily did. The old house-keeper had been, through all the chances and changes of their young lives, the one woman who had stood in any degree, however slight, in the position of a mother to the sisters. That she was a Presbyterian was perfectly true ; for she came of one of those yeoman families of Northumberland who have clung to the old Nonconformist faith despite the change of time. But Gladys had never troubled herself about Mitchell's creed. She only remembered her as the woman to whom she had gone in her earliest childhood for caresses and forbidden delicacies, and with whom, despite their difference of station, she was now on more intimate terms than with any one else in the world, except her sister.

That Mitchell should be deposed from the place of authority she had held so long at Fanesford was terrible enough in itself ; but that the woman whose broad motherly bosom had received all the stories of her childish troubles, and of whose unremitting kindness and sympathy in sickness or sorrow every member of the household had ample experience, should be sent adrift upon the world in her old age, was an act of cruelty and faithlessness of which no Fane that had ever lived would have been guilty. She turned in haste and anger to leave the room in search of her father.

"Be kind enough to sit down, Gladys. I cannot permit your father—who is far from being so strong as we could wish, I am sorry to say, although you do not seem to have observed it—to be disturbed at present. You have little idea how much his nerves have been tried at times by your impetuous fashion of speaking to him—a fashion altogether unbecoming in any young person of gentle birth. I hope that in future you will remember how heavily the cares of the Government press upon his head, and that you will try to lighten as much as possible his home anxieties."

Gladys had remained standing whilst Lady Jane was speaking. Tears of passion and indignation dimmed her eyes, which were fixed upon the distant woods now glorious with the rich foliage of August. Something of the feeling with which she had first heard of her father's marriage returned to her—a vague impression that she was dreaming some dreadful dream from which she would awake presently; that it was a mere delusion that the richly dressed, well-preserved woman who lay in languid state upon the couch was Lady Jane Fane, and her stepmother; and that all this talk about turning away poor Mitchell was nothing more than the wandering of the mind in the fitful fancies of delirium. It was incredible; it was inconceivable; it could not be real! Her eyes fell upon a cloud of rooks wheeling in the air above the tall trees of the wood, and she found herself watching them intently, and speculating on the spot where they would alight; just as though the last ten minutes had been wholly blotted from her memory.

But she was recalled to what was going on by the thin, clear tones of Lady Jane.

"I asked you to be good enough to take a seat, Gladys. Pray do not compel me to put my request in any more authoritative form. My eyes are tired by your standing there in the full light of the sun.

Gladys awoke from that transient dream of a dream in which she had allowed herself to indulge. Ah, it was all too true! There lay Lady Jane with calm, unruffled countenance, and pale blue eyes watching her, coldly and steadily. For an instant the impulse was strong on the girl to defy her stepmother by leaving the room. But there was something in that steadfast scrutiny that cooled her fevered blood. She came back slowly, reluctantly, as one who walks in his sleep, to the chair beside the couch, and seated herself again upon it.

"You are not to suppose, Gladys, that I should have named this matter to you at all, if it had not already been fully decided upon. I believe that at this moment your father is engaged in informing Mrs. Mitchell of the resolution at which we have arrived."

Nothing but her strong sense of pride prevented the girl from bursting into tears at this announcement. But the cruelty of this first move on the part of the enemy whom her father had brought into his house had at least one good effect. It opened her eyes to the reality of the struggle to which she was now committed. She saw that on the side of Lady Jane it would be fought with pitiless determination until the victory was gained.

"I do not wish," continued Lady Jane, in the placid voice which Gladys had already learned to hate, "to begin my life here by seeming to put any restriction upon your innocent pleasures. At the same time, my dear Gladys, I have my duty, my clear duty, to discharge; and I trust that you will feel that in any measure I may take with regard to yourself or your sister, I am acting for the best, and solely with a view to your happiness and welfare."

Gladys forced back the tears from her eyes. "Pray, Lady Jane, make no apologies," she said, in bitter tones; "after hearing what you have decided about Mitchell, I shall not be surprised by any other decision you may have arrived at."

The woman resisted the temptation to enter into a wrangle with the girl over what she felt to be the impertinent demeanour and language of the latter. It was from no generous impulse, however, that she determined to ignore the evident wish of Gladys to insult her. Lady Jane was indeed a person who seldom acted on her impulses, either generous or otherwise.

"There are many matters, Gladys, in which, I fear, your training has been neglected; but we shall not go into these things fully at present. I merely wish to mention two points upon which both I and your father feel very strongly. There is nothing that has a greater tendency to influence the mind of any one than the character of the books one reads and the friendships one forms; and there is no period of life when there is greater danger of evil being contracted from these sources than when one is young and ignorant and self-confident."

It was really more than human nature, even as chastened and subdued in Lady Jane, could bear, to refrain from putting a slight accent of triumph into the last words. But she felt that after all it was good that the girl should be told that she was ignorant and self-conceited.

"I find, my dear, that hitherto no check has been placed by your poor dear father upon your associations, either personal, or what I may call literary. Indeed, I have been shocked to hear the names of some of the acquaintanceships you seem to have formed without his consent, and still more shocked to perceive some of the books which you appear to have been reading."

She paused again as though waiting for Gladys to offer some apology for the shortcomings to which her attention was thus drawn ; but the girl maintained a stolid silence.

"You will not be surprised, I think, my dear," Lady Jane continued, speaking as calmly as though she were merely making a remark upon the weather, "when I tell you that we deem it right that there should be a change in these matters now—a change essential to your happiness and prosperity in after-life. Henceforward it will be one of my duties to provide you with books which are suitable for your age and position, and you must of course understand not only that you must form no new friendships without my express permission, but that any undesirable persons with whom you may already have become acquainted, are not to be recognized by you again."

"Have you anything more to say to me, Lady Jane ?" said Gladys, rising from her seat when she found that her step-mother seemed for the present to have exhausted the statement of her "decisions."

"No, my dear ; nothing more at present. Indeed, my head is already beginning to ache. My nerves, like those of your father, are affected by loud, harsh voices. I should like to be left alone now, if you please. But I hope you will think over all that I have been saying to you, and I am sure that you will see that everything that I have proposed is for the best."

"I shall certainly think it all over, Lady Jane. But I do not want to deceive you. I must beg you to understand that I cannot at present tell you my own opinion about what you seem to have decided on my account."

If Lady Jane had been any one but herself, she would have replied promptly and tartly to the last speech with the words, "Nobody has asked you for your opinion." But it was not her way to indulge her temper in this fashion. She merely smiled languidly but benignantly upon Gladys, and closed her eyes as a polite intimation that the interview was at an end.

Pale and trembling, as though she had received some severe physical shock, the girl sought the solitude of her own room. It was of no use to go to Bertha with her troubles at such a moment. The weak and narrow nature of the younger sister could afford no help to Gladys in a time like this. And indeed for the moment what she had heard from her stepmother seemed too monstrous to be believed. She was positively stunned by the words which that pale woman had uttered in her low, gently modulated voice.

That poor, dear Mitchell was to be sent away, was in itself terrible enough. How could that old house be regarded as a home when the woman who was so closely associated with it in the very earliest memories of Gladys had been removed—dismissed with the scant ceremony with which one sends away an impertinent housemaid? The soul of the girl was fired with an indignant pity as she thought of it all—of the cruelty to which the faithful servant was to be subjected, and of the desolation which must follow her removal.

But it seemed to her as though Lady Jane's further intimations with regard to her intentions went even beyond this act of jealous tyranny. Henceforth, forsooth! she, Gladys Fane, was to read no book of which her stepmother did not approve, to know no friend who had not beforehand submitted successfully to the scrutiny of those cold blue eyes! She laughed aloud as she put the monstrous idea into words.

"Does she think I am a poor, white-hearted slave," she

said to herself, "that she supposes she can treat me so? A woman of twenty, who knows the world, who has been out in society, and who has been her own mistress all her life, to be treated in this fashion, like some naughty school-girl! And I, Gladys Fane, the woman who is to be exposed to all this!"

As the bitter thought flashed through her mind, she caught sight of her own reflection in a toilette glass. She was startled when she saw the change which passion and resentment had made in her face—in the eyes, which blazed with fire; in the cheeks, which glowed from the heat within; in the contracted brow, the proud firm mouth. "I declare I am like the portrait of my great-great-grandmother," she said to herself, with a poor pretence at a smile. "I wonder if Lady Jane will lead me to burn the house down, as she did."

But pain and agitation, and hot indignation such as possessed the soul of Gladys Fane just now, do not permit of any light intrusion upon their dominion. It was only for an instant that the girl was diverted from the thought of her intolerable wrongs. The next moment the memory of them rushed back with overwhelming force. She threw herself upon her bed and burst into a passionate fit of crying, the hysterical violence of which shook her frame.

Meanwhile Lady Jane was lying quietly on the couch in the beautiful boudoir, in which every bit of decoration, every piece of furniture, bore its own testimony to the artist-soul of Gladys. She appeared to be asleep, for her eyes were closed; but she was really thinking coolly and steadily. And presently her lips moved, and the semblance of a smile flitted across her shallow face. She was thinking of how the battle had begun, and of how she had dealt the first blow in that which promised to be a prolonged and arduous struggle.

"I shall bring her to her senses yet," she said softly to herself, and then she dropped off into a real sleep.

Does any one fail to understand what is meant by this phrase when it is used by such a woman as Lady Jane? It means that by day and by night the destined victim of the narrow and

imperious will is to be watched, harassed, tortured, checked until life itself becomes a burden to her; until every natural and honest impulse has been blighted, and the very fountains of love and mirth and joy dried up in the heart. It means that the campaign is not to be won in a single pitched battle, in which victory falls to the stronger; but that there is to be a running fight kept up with a sleepless persistency worthy of the fiend himself—a pitiless ill-will, so vigilant that it will miss no opportunity, however trivial or remote, of wounding the object which has provoked it.

Lady Jane knew that her "system" was not one in which success could be attained by any sudden *coup*. It was by patience and a sleepless vigilance that she had achieved those marvellous triumphs over the refractory daughters of her friends, of which her own little coterie spoke with admiration. She was well aware that there could be no royal road to victory in the case of such a girl as Gladys. Nay; perhaps she was not wholly blind to the fact that in the course of the strife the girl's proud spirit might be broken and crushed and her very life destroyed. She had once had an experience of that kind before in her career as "Miss Rarey." But it was not for her, in the discharge of a solemn duty, to take thought of a possible contingency of that kind. And so her sleep, after that first struggle with Gladys, was as sweet and sound as that of an infant—untroubled by a single thought of the misery in which the heart of her stepdaughter was at that moment steeped.

There is no need to pursue the story of the way in which Lady Jane carried out her system. Mr. Fane was not a man who could stand against such a woman as the wife whom he had taken to his bosom. Her keen and prompt decision saved him from any doubt or hesitation as to the course which she was pursuing, and hardly was she established at Fanesford before her will had become law. Mitchell went, as a matter of course, and in spite of the entreaties of Gladys and Bertha. All that they could do was to secure for her the offer of a handsome retiring allowance. But the old lady had the sturdy

independence of the Northumbrian strongly implanted in her nature. She refused to accept anything; having, indeed, enough of her own on which to live in modest comfort in a Fanesford cottage.

Perhaps Mr. Fane would have been more sceptical as to the virtues of his wife's "system" had that worthy lady not been able before long to point him to a brilliant example of its success in the person of Bertha. His younger daughter soon gave up the struggle against the superior will of her stepmother, and before long she was lauded throughout the county as a pattern of filial piety.

But no such surrender was possible in the case of Gladys; and for long months she kept up the bitter, painful fight against the woman who was anxious to reduce her to utter subjection. More than once the girl thought of marriage as a means of escaping from the intolerable misery of her position. But she had learned to associate marriage with the idea of Lady Jane, and she felt that in taking refuge in it she might, after all, only be escaping from one form of bondage into another. It was in quite another direction that her thoughts turned when she dreamt of freedom.

And so the miserable autumn and winter passed away at last; and the season came again. Gladys during the six long months in which she had been a prisoner at Fanesford had drunk of a cup of degradation and humiliation such as it had never entered into her mind to conceive before. Lady Jane was not a woman to do anything in a half-hearted way. She met defiance with increased severity, and with an absolutely merciless disregard for the feelings of her victim. Even Mr. Fane had been moved on one occasion to remonstrate with his wife when, in the presence of several guests, she openly commented on the fact that the hair of Gladys was not dressed as it ought to be, and requested her to have it attended to at once.

It was at the luncheon table that this incident happened. No one who did not know Lady Jane would have dreamt of the cruel resolution that was masked by the placid silvery voice

in which she spoke. Gladys went out of the room without a word, for she was determined that, come what might, no vulgar brawl between herself and her stepmother should give strangers occasion to jeer. But from that bitter moment there was no hope of peace between these two women on this side of the grave.

Was it wonderful that on escaping from the house which she had now come to regard as a prison, the girl should have thrown herself into the stream of gaiety in London with an eagerness which might well lead those who did not know her to assume that her whole soul was given up to the pursuit of pleasure? All the circumstances too seemed to favour her. The appearance of her portrait on the walls of the Academy gave additional fame to her beauty, whilst her wit had not rusted during the painful sojourn at Fanesford. So she was eagerly courted by a crowd of admirers, and her third season was to all outward appearances an unmixed triumph. Only Gladys herself knew the weariness with which the fast shallow life in which she played so prominent a part, and in which she now held her own all the better because her heart was hardened and her spirit soured, filled her. And even she herself hardly as yet recognized the positive terror with which she recoiled from the thought of another six months' subjection to the "system" of Lady Jane at Fanesford.





CHAPTER XIV.

“BY PASSION DRIVEN.”



HAT it should ever have come to pass that Gladys Fane should regard her old home at Fanesford in the light of a prison! The house where she had been born, where she had spent so many happy years, the house of whose traditions she was so proud, of whose stately comfort she had so keen an appreciation—how could it ever come to figure in her imagination as the gloomiest and most hateful place of bondage?

Gladys herself could hardly realize the change in her own mind regarding this home of hers. Yet as the season waned, and the time drew near when the annual journey from Wilton Gardens to Fanesford must be made, she found that the prospect was one which inspired her with a positive feeling of terror. Deeply indeed must the iron have pierced her soul before her very nature could thus have been transformed. But the misery and humiliation of the six months she had spent at Fanesford under the “system” of Lady Jane had been even more terrible to her than she herself was aware of at the time. That dreary spell of experience had reversed the very currents of her nature; had filled her heart with bitterness, and had

taught her to hate even the places and things which had once been most precious to her.

If she had been discreet, meek, learned in the ways of the world, willing if not ready to endure, instead of being rash, proud, impetuous, and unable to brook control; in other words, if instead of being Gladys Fane she had been somebody else, she would probably by this time have accepted the inevitable, and striven to make the best of it. Bertha, for example, though she had keenly enjoyed the pleasures and the comparative freedom of London during the season, merely heaved a gentle sigh when any mention of their approaching return to Fanesford was made. But, then, Bertha was what the world delights in calling "a sensible girl;" her good sense being shown in the fact that she recognized Lady Jane as her superior in strength of will, and submitted accordingly to that masterful spirit.

But for Gladys no such solution of the problem was possible. As day after day passed her antagonism to the woman who was seeking to sap and mine all the outworks of her spirit, and to beleaguer the citadel itself until in very hunger of soul the garrison surrendered, grew more pronounced and more intense; until at last it had completely taken her captive.

There had been annoyances and humiliations to submit to in London during the season. Lady Jane was not a person to be altogether unmindful of her system under any circumstances. But at least there had been here some chance of escape from the incessant watchfulness, and the never-failing restraint which prevailed at Fanesford. Gladys could laugh and talk with those whom she met, could even indulge in the luxury of open defiance of her stepmother's commands when, for example, she met in society with some of these girl-acquaintances of hers whom her Ladyship disapproved of most strongly. Then the excitement of the round of gaiety—wearisome though it might be—was in itself a distraction; whilst the open admiration which she encountered wherever she went was something that she thoroughly enjoyed, and that diverted

her thoughts from the home which was now miserable to her.

There had been moreover, as Haviland hinted to Rex Mansfield, one or two episodes in her career as a fashionable beauty which had been more exciting than the ordinary experiences of social life. Among the many admirers who had flocked round her no one had attracted more notice from the outer world than the young man who was the son and heir of Sir William Fenwick. Gladys had undoubtedly encouraged him. Was he not an old friend and neighbour in the north, one of those people whose faces were associated with the happy time when no Lady Jane cast her shadow over her existence? It was natural enough that he should be received with an amount of favour which excited the jealousy of her other admirers. She had not the smallest inclination toward the youth himself. He was commonplace to a painful degree, and the chief topic of those conversations of his with Gladys which excited the envy of others, was the one subject which he and she had in common, that of horses.

The notion of falling in love with a man who could talk about nothing but horses was one that seemed ludicrous to Gladys herself. She would as soon have thought of marrying Mr. Delmaine, the thin, stunted, pale-faced young gentleman from Philadelphia, who had also attached himself to her train, and who displayed the devotion of a sheep dog in his attention to her smallest wishes. But, after all, even talk about horses was to be preferred to the neatly clipped formalities of Lady Jane's improving conversation, whilst by keeping young Fenwick at her side, she was at all events able to ward off the serious attacks of lovers whom she had no wish to regard in any other light than that of beings who contributed to her amusement, and who helped to divert her attention from the misery of her own life.

Thus it came to pass that the poor young man from Northumberland, who, like other young men, had not even the faintest notion of the capricious influences by which the actions

of a woman are controlled, brought himself to the happy conclusion that he was not only more highly favoured than the other admirers of Gladys—a conclusion which was quite justifiable—but that he was the one man upon whom her heart was set. Not being as prudent as some youths are—had he not learned to ride straight from his father?—he took no steps to verify his belief upon this point before submitting it to the final test; and when he learned the truth his astonishment and indignation almost surpassed his woe. Lord Lostwithiel had kept the secret of his rejection by Gladys well, more for her sake than for his own. Men knew that he was devoted to her; but no one suspected that she had refused him. Fenwick, however, was a man of a very different type from the shy, awkward, nervous, but faithful Peer. The poor boy could not help crying out when he was hurt. He took all the world into his confidence, and secretly delighted his companions of the Raleigh Club by telling—usually late at night and after copious libations of gin-sling—the story of how he had been deceived and betrayed—for it was in this light that he regarded the conduct of Gladys. The gossip of the Raleigh does not take long to filter down into the streets, and the neat innuendoes of a society journal completed the publicity given to the affair by young Fenwick himself.

All this, which had been very shocking to the unhappy Mr. Fane, and which, if his wife was to be believed, had caused that worthy lady's hair to turn grey, had been to Gladys a diversion and a relief. This heroine of ours, it will be seen, was not perfect. Even now, when she was feeling something of the sting and bitterness of sorrow in her own heart, she had far too little consideration for the pangs of others. She would not willingly have hurt any living creature; but she regarded the homage of young men as her birthright, and if they chose to cast themselves before her, how was she to imagine that it hurt them when she trod upon their prostrate forms?

But at Fanesford all these modes of escape from the tyranny of Lady Jane would be closed against her. Too well she knew

from the experience of the past year to what she would return if she went back to her country home. She saw the long succession of days of joyless existence, when there was no one to flirt with, and no occupation to divert the mind more exciting than the maintenance of the struggle with her stepmother. The girl's very heart turned sick when, at the breakfast table, the name of Fanesford was mentioned; and she vowed to herself that, come what might, she would not endure again the miseries of a prolonged sojourn there in the society of Lady Jane. Many a sleepless night was passed before this resolve was formed. Headstrong and impetuous as Gladys was, she was still clear-sighted enough to know that the obstacles to the carrying out of her determination were all but insurmountable. There was, it is true, one royal road of escape. She might marry Lord Lostwithiel, or some other of her admirers. But the more she thought of this plan, the more distasteful it became to her. Indeed as the season hastened to its finish she had to confess to herself that she was only one degree less weary of the flatteries and frivolities, which formed the very atmosphere she breathed in society, than she was of the unendurable monotony of existence at Fanesford.

One day a happy chance found her at the luncheon table alone with her father, and acting on a sudden impulse she resolved to make an appeal to him.

"Papa!" said the girl, regarding Mr. Fane with wistful eyes, "will you let me speak to you about myself? There is something I want particularly to say to you."

Her father regarded her with surprise, not unmingled with anxiety. In that household any direct or confidential communications between parent and child usually meant trouble on the one side or on both.

"And pray, Gladys, what is it you wish to say? I am afraid I must ask you to tell me as briefly as you can, for you know that there is a morning sitting at the House to-day."

"I want you," said Gladys, with a face which had suddenly flushed rosy red from brow to chin—"I want you to let me go away somewhere this autumn."

"Go away somewhere! Why, of course we shall all leave town in a couple of weeks. You don't, I suppose, mean by 'somewhere' any place but Fanesford?" Mr. Fane, it must be said, had an uncomfortable suspicion that this was precisely what his daughter did mean, but he would not allow her to imagine that he had any idea of the sort in his head.

"Papa, I cannot go to Fanesford with you; I cannot! I cannot!" cried Gladys, with passion and entreaty blended in her tones.

"Cannot go to Fanesford!" echoed her father, with an assumption of lofty incredulity and displeasure.

"Papa," continued the girl, speaking more calmly, though her agitation was shown by the way in which she crumbled a piece of bread that lay beside her plate, "you must know how wretched I am. We are all wretched. I know you think it is my fault and not Lady Jane's. Perhaps it is. I don't want to defend myself; but would it not be better for all our sakes, if I were to go away somewhere for a little while, and perhaps things might improve?"

Mr. Fane could not meet the earnest gaze of his daughter. She looked so lovely; and so wretched! All the light had gone out of the beautiful face. Nay, it struck him in a moment, with a sharp sense of pain that the bloom of her youth was beginning to disappear; that there was a distinct change for the worse in her outward appearance; something which seemed to indicate that she had not passed unharmed through the ordeal of the past year. Can there be any pain in life greater than that which comes home to a father's heart, when he first sees that the child of his love is beginning to enter upon those dull grey days of sorrow and endurance, which sooner or later fall to the lot of most of us! Even Mr. Fane's unemotional nature was stirred by the picture that his daughter presented to his eyes.

But to go away—away from London, and away from Fanesford! That, at least, was clearly out of the question.

"Where in the world do you dream of going?" he asked,

with a touch of anger in his voice that was perhaps only assumed to hide the pain at his heart.

"I do not care where it is, so long as it is out of England, and away from, from ——" Even the courage of Gladys was not equal to the task of naming Lady Jane.

"Yes," said her father, with bitterness. "I know what you mean. It is to get away from home, and from the control to which, too late in your life, I fear, you are now subjected that you make this wild proposal to me. It is like your reckless and wayward nature to seek this easy mode of escape from the miseries in which you have involved both yourself and others."

And then Mr. Fane, as was his wont, growing warm at the sound of his own eloquence, plunged into a disquisition upon the many sins of which his daughter had been guilty; upon the complete disregard she had shown for the feelings of Lady Jane, upon the recklessness she had exhibited in her demeanour in public, upon her frivolity, her thoughtlessness, and all the other topics that suggested themselves to his disturbed mind at the moment.

Nor was the lecture by any means devoid of personal illustrations. On the contrary, he repeatedly enforced what he had to say by reference to particular actions on his daughter's part. Gladys received more than one of these allusions with a look of surprise and indignation that convinced Mr. Fane that his remarks had gone home to her conscience. At last, when he took up the story of her flirtation with young Fenwick, and expressed his own and his wife's sense of the horror with which they found that she had become the subject of comments in the newspapers, she could restrain herself no longer.

"If you really think me so wicked as you say," she said, in a voice which trembled with agitation and passion, "will it not be better for me to go away from you altogether, so that I may no longer disgrace you? I have no doubt that Lady Jane would be delighted to see me out of the way."

Mr. Fane stopped her with an imperious gesture. "Gladys," he cried, "I shall hear nothing from you that is disrespectful to

my wife. If you refuse to acknowledge her as a mother, I shall at least require you to submit to her as the mistress of this house."

The girl's mood underwent a sudden change. The bitterness which had taken possession of her spirit as she listened whilst her father retailed all the malicious and exaggerated tittle-tattle regarding herself which had been poured into his ear by his wife passed away. She looked at Mr. Fane, and noted the marks of care that were now unmistakable upon his face. She ignored, as only a child can ignore, the hardness of his manner, the harshness of his tones. All the misery and the tragedy of a separation from the being who was associated with her earliest joys and sorrows, rushed before her in a terrible vision that burnt itself in upon her sensitive imagination. If she had but succeeded at that moment in mastering the hard saying that men and women are born into this world of ours, not to be the children of joy, but the servants of duty; if she could but have seen the two roads of life—the path of self-pleasing and that of self-renunciation—with the goal, the inevitable goal of each, set before her in clear perspective, how different all her future life might have been!

But for Gladys Fane, as for all other mortals, highly gifted or the reverse, there could be no royal road to the knowledge that is born of experience; and like every other daughter of Eve, she had to learn for herself all those truths, wholesome and bitter, that make up the secret of life. Thus, though she felt the pain and misery that must accompany separation from those she loved, she still felt that anything was to be preferred to the daily and hourly strife and humiliation of the life she was now leading. The proud young heart rose in angry revolt against the servitude in which it was being kept. What could fate have in store for her more intolerable than this pilgrimage of pain through which she was now passing? Like the shipwrecked sailor who has grown heart-sick on the barren rock on which he has been cast, she preferred even the unknown terrors of the wide ocean, with all its mighty warring forces, to the

miseries and sufferings of the narrow life which hemmed her in.

So that momentary impulse which had prompted her to cast herself at her father's feet, and implore his pity and forgiveness, passed away, as such impulses too often do, unimproved. The next instant, as she looked into the cold, severe, shallow face of Mr. Fane, she shuddered as she thought how nearly she had again shocked him with a melodramatic exhibition of emotion, and congratulated herself upon the fact that her father had no knowledge of what had been passing in her mind.

And so day by day in this journey of life human hearts beat within earshot of each other, and even profess to make full revelation the one to the other of the passions, the hopes, the fears which stir them ; and all the while there hangs between the two a veil which can never be rent, and a smile or a sneer, a laugh or a jest, masks the volcano which is raging beneath the surface.

Gladys was right. Her father knew nothing of that wave of passionate emotion which had swept across her heart. He only saw that she hesitated ; that the colour went and came in her face, and that her eyes shone with even more than their wonted brightness. He thought, poor soul, that she was hardening herself against the word of reproof which he had uttered concerning her demeanour toward Lady Jane ; and he felt it to be his duty to meet her impenitence with increased severity on his own side.

"It is useless, Gladys," he said, "to propose to me anything so preposterous as your removal from home, whilst you continue to show such marked disrespect toward my wife. I can show no indulgence to the wishes of an undutiful child."

And thereupon he left the room.

As he walked through the streets on his road to the House his heart was hot within him. If he had attempted to analyze his sentiments, he would possibly have found that no small part of the anger that burned in his breast was really directed against Lady Jane. But he was not the sort of man who

indulges in introspection, and it seldom fell to his lot to make startling discoveries of this kind. He imagined that it was his daughter, and his daughter only, who excited his vehement wrath.

He turned over in his mind all the splendid chances which had come in the girl's way. He knew perfectly well that if she were not now the wife of Lostwithiel, the fault was her own. He had seen too that other suitors, hardly less eligible, had been dismissed with a levity which was altogether repugnant to the nature and traditions of the Fanes. Then he thought of her beauty, of her brilliant talents, of the place she had taken without an effort in society, and which she yet seemed to value so lightly; and he contrasted the position she thus held with the unrest and misery which appeared to characterize her spirit, with her flagrant discontent with her surroundings, her open revolt against authority. What if Lady Jane were somewhat harsh and tyrannical in character, despite that smooth and placid exterior of hers—the poor man had at last got an inkling of this truth!—surely a girl with the abilities of Gladys might still be happy and satisfied. And then he sighed, as he thought of how the bright, wayward child had developed into this beautiful woman, over whom he seemed to have lost all control, and who, he felt in his bitterness, was a stranger in her own home, an alien in the midst of her family.

But by this time he had reached the Lobby, and a dozen eager voices were clamouring for information as to the Turnpike Bill, with the charge of which he was intrusted. The familiar din of the well-loved spot drove from his mind all thoughts referring to anything so insignificant as a mere question of domestic interest; the respectful salutes of the strangers to whom he was pointed out, and even of the smaller men among his fellow-members, soothed his ruffled spirit; and by the time that he had taken his seat upon that remote corner of the Treasury bench which was allotted to him, he had quite forgotten the young girl who, with dry eyes and passion-driven heart, was making or marring her own destiny in the solitude of her room in Wilton Gardens.



CHAPTER XV.

THE CLIMAX OF OFFENDING.



HE recollection of his daughter's face of misery came back to Mr. Fane by and by. At certain hours of the evening the House of Commons is a spot where the conditions most favourable to reflection prevail; and shortly after nine o'clock, when he was assisting in "keeping a House" whilst a young gentleman, who had recently returned from a winter's tour in India, was discoursing on the interesting topic of the Indian Budget, the Member for Fanesford found himself revolving in his mind a problem which had nothing to do with the growing of opium, or the salt duty, or the income-tax, or any of the other topics upon which the young man, who for the moment represented Her Majesty's Opposition, was holding forth with such miraculous fluency and self-confidence.

And the result of the thoughts that passed through his mind during the dreary half-hour of monotonous speech which had to be endured before a count-out cut short his misery, was that he resolved to make an appeal to his wife.

It was with an air of something like conscious guilt that he

opened the attack next morning, when Lady Jane, according to her custom, was breakfasting in her own room.

"Don't you think Gladys is looking rather unwell just now ; I mean more unwell than girls usually do at the close of the season?"

"Young girls who lead the kind of life to which Gladys is given can hardly expect to look otherwise than ill," was the immediate response of Lady Jane.

"The kind of life," replied Mr. Fane, with a look of bewilderment on his face. "What does that mean? I do not suppose that Gladys differs much from other girls, except, perhaps, in her impetuosity and wilfulness. You have found nothing wrong with her in her principles, I hope."

"Ah! there are so many different standards by which the world judges our actions. To me it seems that everything is wrong with Gladys; whilst I have no doubt that to you she appears nothing short of perfection."

"That is nonsense," said Mr. Fane, hastily. He was annoyed at the unfounded imputation. "I beg your pardon for speaking so plainly; but really you cannot charge me with blindness to the faults of Gladys. Still I do not propose to discuss her faults now. I wanted to speak to you about her because she herself spoke to me yesterday."

"Yes," said Lady Jane, with placid indifference as she gently sipped her tea.

"Oh, you must know that the girl is unhappy!" cried the husband, hotly. "Why, everybody is remarking the difference in her appearance within the last year. She looks quite worn and old."

"And does no explanation of the change in her appearance suggest itself to you?" asked Lady Jane. She was not at all angry at the fact that Mr. Fane had begun this conversation. It was really what she had been longing for for some time past.

"I know she has been foolish, and that she has been given to flirting this year; and, of course, I am aware that she has not got on so well with you as she might have done. But let

all that pass for the moment. What I want to ask you is whether you can think of no way of putting matters on a more comfortable footing between her and yourself?"

"Really, you surprise me," said the wife. "Have I given you any cause to think that it was my fault that Gladys was unhappy? When you asked me to marry you, you asked me to take care of your daughters as a mother would; and that I pledge, at least, I have tried to redeem. Of course you will blame me because she is self-willed, and vain, and heartless, and insolent; that is always a man's course when anything happens to thwart him. Well, think as hardly of me as you please; but, after all, I am afraid your condemning me will not make such a girl as Gladys what she ought to be, and what she must be before any one can expect her to be happy."

Mr. Fane saw that he had little chance of being helped by his wife, unless he came to the point at once. Now, as it happened, he had actually formed a theory of his own regarding his daughter whilst he sat thinking about her on the Treasury bench. He resolved that he would broach this theory to his wife without any further beating about the bush.

"Do you know," he said, with pretended coolness, "I have been thinking a great deal about the affair lately. I can see that she is very unhappy, and I am afraid that she does not add to your happiness whilst she remains in her present mood—"

"Oh, pray do not let any thought of that kind influence you!" ejaculated Lady Jane.

"Well, but you know I am bound to think about both of you. I am afraid I miscalculated the strength of her will when I spoke to you before our marriage. I had no idea at that time of the difficulties in which I was going to involve you. So far as that is concerned, indeed, I almost feel as though I ought to apologize to you for having given you such a hard task to perform."

Lady Jane smiled with languid benignity upon her husband; but she made no attempt to lead up to the point at which he

was evidently aiming. Upon the whole she was amused rather than annoyed by his manifest embarrassment.

"Well, to cut a long story short," he blurted forth in an agony of trepidation, "I have been thinking that it would be a good thing if she were to be married to some one. Don't you think so too?" he added, eagerly.

"That would depend entirely upon the person to whom she was married. Unfortunately, as you know, she has already allowed herself to be mixed up in all manner of foolish flirtations, and she has been talked about in consequence far more than is good for the chances of a young girl. I see no one at present who is suitable and who is at the same time likely to make her an offer. But, perhaps, you have been thinking of some one yourself," she said, with much calmness, though there was a touch of sarcasm in her voice.

"Oh, not at all, not at all," cried the father, hurriedly; but in his very haste he betrayed himself. His wife said nothing, but contented herself with watching him narrowly.

"Of course," he went on after a pause, "there is Lostwithiel. He is eligible in every way."

"Oh, Lord Lostwithiel would undoubtedly be eligible, most eligible; but it has struck me that he has rather avoided Gladys than sought her society."

This was true to a certain extent; for ever since his rejection the Earl, whilst always frank and kind when he met the girl whom he had once been anxious to marry, had kept aloof from her as much as was possible in London. The truth was that he had found there was more peace of mind for himself when he was out of the reach of the brilliant creature who had fascinated him than when he was sunning himself in those smiles which now, alas! conveyed no secret message to his soul. He had not yet attained to the "wise indifference of the wise," and it still pained him to see her laughing and talking, with that unconstrained gaiety which characterized her in society, with the men whom he regarded as his rivals.

"Oh, but I assure you Lostwithiel used to pay Gladys great

attention at one time," said Mr. Fane, in reply to the last observation of his wife. "Indeed, I quite thought that they would make it up. I fancy there was some little tiff between them, probably some silly lovers' quarrel; but I think we might manage to put that right. And you know he is such a good fellow; I am sure he would make her a good husband. And then nothing could be better than the position he has—I mean as one of our neighbours, you know."

Lady Jane promised to think the matter over; and, as usual, she kept her promise. She did not hate Gladys; but she certainly did not like her, and she was most anxious to bend her proud spirit. She was already, however, beginning to recognize the fact that the task of breaking her in was a much more difficult one than she had anticipated when she undertook it. If the girl could be married to a husband chosen, not by herself, but by those whose wisdom and experience of the world enabled them to judge much more correctly as to what would and what would not be of advantage to her than she herself could, then Lady Jane saw that the breaking-in process might be carried on both more easily and more effectually than had been the case hitherto.

So the end of it was that Lord Lostwithiel was asked to dine in Wilton Gardens, and was received with so much friendliness by everybody that he found himself dragged once more, whether he liked it or not, into the circle of the professed admirers of the Fanesford beauty.

Nothing but the irresistible fascination which Gladys could exercise over him induced Lostwithiel to become again a frequenter of Mr. Fane's house. For he did not deceive himself as to the character of his reception by our heroine. Its very friendliness was a warning to him. He still hoped, with the persistency of a faithful heart, that some day this glorious creature might consent to be his; but he found no signs of any relenting toward him in the gay smile with which she welcomed him in the drawing-room, or even in the frank conversations in which she engaged him when, as somehow

often happened after that dinner party, he found himself escorting her to one or other of the entertainments wherewith society diverts itself during the season.

But whilst he did not delude himself with any false hopes with regard to the mind of Gladys herself, he by no means closed his eyes to the meaning of the extraordinary graciousness with which he was received by Lady Jane. He had not enjoyed the experiences of a rich Earl for nothing ; and he had already learned what the attentions and flatteries bestowed upon him by the mothers of pretty daughters were worth, as well as what they meant. Usually this young man turned away with a feeling not far removed from disgust from the parents who thus limed the twig for him. But he had no such feelings now. The lady who stood in the place of mother to Gladys Fane might take liberties that no one else could have attempted with impunity.

And so cleverly did Lady Jane play her part, so admirably did she simulate friendship, sympathy, and a yearning desire for closer acquaintance, that at last she achieved her purpose, and brought Lord Lostwithiel to the sticking-point.

"Girls are always a cause of anxiety to their mothers, my dear Lord Lostwithiel ; and that is more particularly the case when the relationship is what mine is to Mr. Fane's children. Oh, I cannot tell you how much anxiety I have had, especially with regard to dear Gladys. You have known her a long time, Lord Lostwithiel—ever since she was a child, have you not? You need not be told, therefore, that in some small matters she is peculiar. A little too fond of pleasure perhaps, and too apt to reject good advice. Still I need not say to you that there is a certain distinction about her which is peculiar and even remarkable."

How often he had heard similar speeches from other mothers, and had closed his heart, if not his ears, to the insidious suggestions with which they abounded ! But now, so true is it that circumstances alter cases, he swallowed the bait as greedily as the veriest greenhorn could have done.

"I have always thought Miss Fane was not only the handsomest but the most fascinating girl I ever saw, Lady Jane," he said, with the utmost frankness.

"Ah, I am afraid that because she is an old friend of yours in the country, you allow yourself to be prejudiced in her favour. Not but that you get much better opportunities of judging girls away from town than you do here."

"But Heaven forbid that I should seem to be judging Miss Fane. Lady Jane," he continued, with much earnestness, "since your marriage there has somehow or other been a separation between Gladys and me. You don't know how much I have felt it. There is nobody whom I admire and like so much as I like and admire her; but she seems to have entered upon a new life lately, and it has cut me off almost entirely from her. I am afraid I am too slow and old-fashioned in my ways to please her."

"Ah, my dear Lord Lostwithiel, you can hardly think so poorly of yourself as to imagine that. But you must not judge Gladys by mere outward appearances. 'It is true I have not known her so long as you have done; but still, living so long under the same roof with her, I have naturally got to know her very well. Of course, we do not always agree," said Lady Jane, with much candour. "That is hardly to be expected. But I know enough of her to be able to say that you would make a great mistake in supposing that she despised you."

"I do not know," replied the luckless young man, and there was something almost pathetic in his tone as he spoke. "Gladys is, I think, the most honest girl I ever met with; and I fear that I judge her feelings about myself only too accurately. Since you have been so kind as to speak about her to me, Lady Jane, you will forgive me, I hope, if I tell you that I should like nothing better than to win her as my wife. I dreamed of it years ago, and once I thought that my dream might come true. I am not so hopeful now."

There was no air of triumph about Lady Jane when she extracted this avowal from the young Peer. And yet the glow

of satisfaction at her heart was intense. She already saw herself engaged in the task of converting this young man—whose want of intellectual brightness was more apparent to her than his manliness and honesty—into the instrument by means of which her “system” was to be imposed upon the rebellious and defiant Gladys. Moreover to have secured such a husband for her stepdaughter—“fortune, position, and character alike unexceptionable,” she thought to herself—would be a decided feather in her cap in her character of stepmother.

But she only smiled in gentle sympathy upon her victim.

“Oh, you underrate your own merits and your prospects,” she said; “but it is as delightful as it is rare to find a man now-a-days who takes a modest view of himself.”

“Then do you think there is really a chance for me?” he asked, eagerly.

“Nay, I have no right to answer such a question off-hand, Lord Lostwithiel. I only know that both by Mr. Fane and by myself you would be welcomed as the husband of Gladys. There is no man, indeed, in whom Mr. Fane has more confidence than he appears to have in you.”

Now this conversation had the effect of making Lord Lostwithiel feel that he was bound in honour to offer himself again to Gladys. He loved her still—as much as he had ever done. Yet, if the truth must be told, he was unfeignedly sorry, directly after the talk was at an end, to find himself in this dilemma; for in spite of everything that Lady Jane had said, he was secretly convinced that he stood no higher in the girl's graces than he did on the day when she rejected him in the Fanesford woods. But he remembered the old stanza about the man who “dare not put it to the touch, to win or lose it all;” and, having committed himself to Lady Jane, he resolved to lose no further time in making his appeal to Gladys.

Happily, there was no compulsion as to the precise mode in which he should carry out his resolution; and remembering how he had fared when he spoke to the girl on that cold February day in Northumberland he resolved to write on this

occasion. The letter which he duly concocted, he flattered himself was a model of ingenuity and good taste.

By return of post he received the following :—

“Wilton Gardens, Saturday.

“DEAR LORD LOSTWITHIEL,—

“Oh, why did you do it? I was sure my lady meant to try and make mischief of this kind between us; but I had so much confidence in your kindness and good sense, that I never supposed she would succeed.

“Did you really imagine that when I would not marry you for your own sake, I would be likely to marry you for hers? What short-sighted creatures you men are!

“Now, dear Lord Lostwithiel—I would say dear Frank, only I should probably shock you by doing so—I must tell you that I like to think of you as one of my oldest, and kindest, and best friends; and I want to continue to think of you in this way; so I have burnt your letter, and we shall forget all about it, shall we not?

“You must not think me unkind because I am writing in this fashion; but the fact is, your letter told me a great deal more than you imagined, and I saw as plainly as though you had said it in words, that you were writing not of your own free-will at all, but at the instigation of my lady. But I shall forgive you *just this once*, and we shall be friends again—the best of friends, I hope—for the rest of our lives.

“Always yours sincerely,

“GLADYS FANE.”

A day or two afterwards the secret came out; it was elicited by means of a direct question which Lady Jane put to Lostwithiel. He, poor fellow, had accepted his fate as a foregone conclusion. He was a good deal “cut up,” as the phrase goes; and resolved that he would find relief in travel. But he had pluck enough to determine that he would not allow this little episode in the story of their friendship to blight the hopes

he had formed as to the character which that friendship was ultimately to assume. In the meantime, however, he was a little sore; chiefly with Lady Jane for having exposed him to this rebuff.

Perhaps it was this feeling which led him to answer her Ladyship rather shortly when she asked him whether he had yet found an opportunity of speaking to Gladys.

"No, Lady Jane," he said, "I have not spoken to her. I have written; and it's just as I told you it would be, I have got my *congé*."

If he had known how Lady Jane would take this announcement, he would undoubtedly have put it in a more guarded form. She turned pale when she heard the news, and her cold eyes glittered with a frosty light.

"I think there must be some mistake, Lord Lostwithiel," she murmured. "But I shall speak to Gladys herself."

And she did speak to the girl. For the first time they came into the most direct and open collision. The pale, quiet woman, with her gentle ways and refined speech, had never before been directly and deliberately thwarted by one of whose welfare she had constituted herself the guardian. The notion that Gladys should refuse Lord Lostwithiel at all was shocking in her eyes, and that the girl should have done so without consulting her parents was even more deplorable. But when she found, as she quickly did, that Gladys meant to persist in this refusal, in defiance of the wishes of her father, Lady Jane's anger knew no bounds.

She herself was careful to conceal the intense bitterness which filled her soul. There was no reason why she should exhaust herself in passionate remonstrances with Gladys, seeing that her husband was quite ready to undertake this part of the work. Mr. Fane's heart was now set on this marriage, in which he saw the happiest solution of the domestic difficulties by which he was beset; and even if his wife had not been at hand to stir up his anger against his rebellious daughter, it would have been extreme. As it was, his rage was terrible to see.

Even the proud spirit of Gladys quailed before the man's tempestuous wrath.

"You talk of Lord Lostwithiel as though he were some wretched adventurer upon whom you had turned your back," he cried, at the close of a stormy interview with his daughter. "Yet you know what he is both by birth and fortune. You know too that he is a perfect gentleman; and you yourself confess that you like him. Yet, forsooth! you refuse to marry him, chiefly, I believe, because I and your mother wish it. It is time to put an end to this nonsense. I mean to ask Lord Lostwithiel to Fanesford as soon as we go down; and you will understand that it is my fixed resolve that if he should offer himself again you shall accept him, or ——" He paused, either exhausted by the vehemence of his anger or because he had not thought of any alternative.

"Or what, sir?" said Gladys, facing him with the cold, proud air that she had shown years before, when father and daughter were first brought into collision with each other.

"Or I shall feel that you have forfeited your place as a child of mine," said the strong man, in his rage.

"Very well, papa," said Gladys, with a calmness that Lady Jane herself could hardly have surpassed. "I know the alternative which is set before me, and whatever my choice may be, I shall make it with my eyes open."

She knew that it was Lady Jane who had instigated Lord Lostwithiel to renew his offer to her, and that it was she who was the real directing hand in her father's attack upon her. If it had been only with him that she was called upon to deal, she would have known how to meet the storm. But she had already grasped the fact that this stepmother of hers was pitiless in her resolution. To return to Fanesford meant, then, to enter upon a battle in which one or other must be utterly crushed.

"May I ask, Lady Jane, when we go down to Northumberland?" she asked on the morning after that stormy scene with her father.

Lady Jane eyed her for a moment with suspicion ; but the face of Gladys betrayed nothing.

“ We have decided to leave town next week ; and let me say, as you have mentioned Fanesford, that I trust, for your own sake as well as ours, you are preparing to act as your father wishes. You understand, of course, that he means what he says in this matter ? ”

But the girl made no reply to this inquiry.





CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE MORNING.



IT was the last great reception of the season, and "all the world" was to be found gathered together in the great saloons of Exminster house. Some absentees, indeed, there already were, for the ranks of society were thinning rapidly. But the House was still sitting, and the visit of a foreign potentate of some distinction had sufficed to keep most persons of political or social importance in town. Thus it happened that although the last week of July had been reached, the noble apartments of Exminster House were more crowded for this closing reception of her friends by the Marchioness than they had been at any previous gathering during the season.

"What a crush, Lady Jane," said Lord Lostwithiel, perspiring, and even redder than usual; "one would imagine that we were still in June."

"It is really wonderful, Lord Lostwithiel, where the men and women come from to fill all these rooms. I am sure half the people have gone away already; and yet this is the largest reception this year. But there are so many strange faces about

that perhaps Lady Exminster has been beating the highways and hedges for her company."

"Yes; I have seen some faces at least that one does not often meet with in society. By the way, Lady Jane, there is one man here in whom you ought to take some interest. Ah! there he is, talking to Sir William Fenwick. I mean the tall man with the brown hair.

Lady Jane looked with an air of aristocratic indifference in the direction indicated by Lord Lostwithiel. "There is nothing very striking about him. Who is he?"

"He is the man who fought your husband at Fanesford at the general election. Mansfield, they call him. I know very little about him except that he is said to be well off, and that he behaved himself in rather a gentlemanly way at the election."

"Ah! I remember hearing something about it," said Lady Jane in her well-bred gentle accents. "But I heard also that he was a person of no family whatever—absolutely none." Then she dropped the subject as one that could possess merely the faintest interest for her.

"I wish, Lord Lostwithiel," she added, "you could find Mr. Fane. I am beginning to feel tired."

Lord Lostwithiel wished in his heart that he had been asked to fulfil another commission. He knew that Gladys was present, though he had not seen her: and he was anxious, if possible, to have a little talk with her to-night. He was well aware that so far as the present season was concerned this was probably the last opportunity he would enjoy of meeting the girl he loved; and as he was about to start on a trip through the United States, there would be no chance of seeing her in Northumberland for some time to come.

He fought his way through the mob toward the inner room where he supposed that Mr. Fane would be found. He was not there, however, and the Peer was turning to a smaller apartment when the well-known voice of Gladys caught his ear.

She was looking her very best, and laughing in her gayest manner; but there was something in the ring of that laugh which Lord Lostwithiel heard with pain. She saw him as he turned toward her, and favoured him with a saucy glance and that brisk little nod of the head which now-a-days does duty on the part of young ladies in society for the old-fashioned bow. Across the shoulders of the men and women who intervened between them Lostwithiel cast a wistful, envious glance at the persons with whom Gladys was talking. Their backs were turned to him, and all that he could see was that one of them was unusually tall and apparently well-favoured. With a spasm of jealous pain he saw the bright upward glance of her eyes as she looked into the stranger's face. He had not yet quite mastered the fact that the expressive language of this young lady's eyes was not one which she reserved for one favoured soul alone. As yet all the world was welcome to sun itself in the light of those brilliant orbs.

An opportune movement in the crowd gave Lostwithiel the chance of approaching her, and he eagerly seized it. It seemed to him that Gladys, though she did not look at him, was not only conscious of his approach, but was moved in some strange way, apparently by anger, as he drew near. But when she gave him her hand, she allowed it to remain in his for something more than the necessary second of time, and there was a perceptible touch of gentleness in her voice as she said—

"I know Lady Jane has commissioned you to look for papa. You will find him in there, talking to the American Minister."

It was with one of her brightest and kindest smiles that these words were accompanied; but there was no mistaking the intention of the speaker, and Lostwithiel took his dismissal promptly though ruefully; whilst Gladys turned to speak to the tall man with whom she had been conversing before his approach.

"You show very little favour to your old friends, Miss Fane," said Jack Haviland, who was one of the two favoured

persons with whom Gladys was talking. "Poor Lostwithiel has gone off like a criminal to execution."

"Please do not make fun of Lord Lostwithiel," was the quick response; "he is one of my very oldest friends, and I like him immensely, although he may be a little bit of a bore."

"I have heard," said Haviland's companion, who was none other than Prince Bessarion, "of Lord Lostwithiel—a great nobleman, is he not? Your English nobles seem to me to be always so admirable; so much of the gentleman, as you say."

"Oh, do not flatter our English noblemen," said Gladys. "They have no need of that to get what we call in the north 'a good conceit of themselves.' Besides, I shall think you are really wishing to hear our opinion of the Continental nobles," and she threw one of her mocking glances at the Prince, who was manifestly in the first stage of fascination.

"Ah," said he, with a bow, "it would be too much honour to suppose that Miss Fane would even dream of forming, much less of expressing, an opinion about a person so insignificant as myself."

Gladys would probably have been surprised by the discovery that the handsome Pole or Greek—she could not quite decide which—whom Haviland had taken upon himself to introduce to her during the momentary absence of her father from her side, was a gentleman given to making speeches of this character. But, as a matter of fact, nothing seemed to strike her as uncommon this evening. Even when Haviland had pointed out Mansfield to her, and for the first time since that encounter in the streets of Fanesford, which had moved her so deeply at the time, she had seen the hero of the election, she had experienced no sensation of surprise. The colour on her cheeks was rather higher than usual to-night, and her eyes shone with even more than their ordinary lustre. Never had she been more vivacious, more charming. This unlucky Prince, who was taking shelter for a while from foreign tyranny under the hospitable flag of England, was fairly fascinated by her. And yet, to a close observer, it might have seemed

that she was scarcely conscious of all that was passing around her; that the light and flippant words which fell from her lips were spoken not only without premeditation, but without her own knowledge of what she was saying, and that the only time when any real light of consciousness had shone in her eyes had been at the moment when her hand rested in that of Lord Lostwithiel. To a spectator who was at once acute and cynical, she might have appeared to be playing a part this evening. But if it were so, it is only fair to Gladys to say that her acting deceived even herself.

When Lostwithiel, having accomplished his mission, found himself once more in the neighbourhood of Lady Jane, that lady inquired whether Miss Fane were with her father.

"She is near him," said the Peer, wishful to avoid any further explanation; but Lady Jane was not a woman to be balked in this manner.

"To whom was she speaking?" she asked.

"I can hardly say. There were several people beside her. One of them was a man I had never seen before—a very tall, good-looking fellow. Another was Haviland."

"That odious Mr. Haviland!" said her ladyship, raising her voice slightly, very slightly, above its usual level; but speaking so clearly and distinctly that it was impossible for a gentleman who happened to have been brought near to her by the slow movement of the throng not to hear and understand all that she said. "I have already told Gladys, Lord Lostwithiel, that I cannot permit her to speak to that person. Will you have the kindness to go at once and request her to come to me? Bring her back with you, Lord Lostwithiel," she added, as the Peer retreated to fulfil this second commission, which, even although it might give him the chance of a minute's talk with Gladys, was not so pleasant in its nature as he could have wished.

Rex Mansfield, who had been the unwilling listener to whom Lady Jane's instructions to Lord Lostwithiel had been confided, felt a great desire to see again the face of the beautiful girl

whom he had met at Fanesford eighteen months before. He remembered the triumphant insolence with which, in the superiority of her youth and her beauty, her ignorance, and her recklessness, she had smiled upon him on that day on which he encountered the bitterness of defeat. He had heard since then little scraps of her history which had convinced him that her life could not have been quite the brilliant and unclouded one to which she appeared to have been born, and moved by the interest of the philosopher—not to speak of the curiosity of the man—he resolved to await the return of Lord Lostwithiel from his mission.

Ensconced in a corner, where, without being seen himself, he could still see all that was passing in the neighbourhood of Lady Jane, he stood patiently and thoughtfully for several minutes. It was evident, at least, that Gladys was in no hurry to obey the summons of her stepmother. Mansfield watched the countenance of that lady closely, and he saw through that limpid mask of a perfect manner something of the pitiless resolution, the petty jealousy and spitefulness that lay beneath. A long look at those carefully preserved features sufficed to convince him that the life of Gladys Fane in the house of which this woman was mistress could not be a happy one.

At last the girl herself appeared, accompanied not merely by Lord Lostwithiel, but by her father. Mansfield had moved away beyond earshot of Lady Jane, but there was no mistaking the bitter temper in which she received her stepdaughter. It was not that, however, which interested Mansfield most, as he looked at the little group. It was the demeanour of Gladys herself that absorbed his attention: The air of proud yet wearied indifference with which she listened to the biting sarcasms which were manifestly being poured forth from those thin lips; the look, half of pity half of scorn, which she cast once upon her father when he spoke, were not lost upon an observer like Rex.

“If that girl is not being driven to destruction,” he said to himself, “no girl in this world ever was.”

Yes : it was not a little strange that to Rex Mansfield should have fallen the lot of watching that group, standing apart in the crowded saloon of Exminster House. Except for the radiant beauty of Gladys herself, it was to all outward appearance such a commonplace group. Two men and two women; the men, at least, having nothing to distinguish them from the most ordinary of mortals ! And yet what passions, fears, hopes, resentments were concentrated in these four persons ; and in the heart of one of them at this moment what a well of measureless despair !

Unperceived by Mr. Fane, or the rest of the party, Rex succeeded in gaining the door, and presently he found himself enjoying the cool air as he strolled eastward to his chambers in the Temple.

His sitting-room on the ground floor of Garden Court afforded evidence that although its occupant might belong to the noble company of the briefless, he was not on that account to be reckoned among the threadbare aspirants to legal honours who abound within the precincts of those dim and quiet courts. It was unmistakably the abode of a man of means and culture. The furniture was handsome, although it gave evidence of the fact that something of bachelor disregard for appearances belonged to its owner. The floor was covered with faded Persian carpets, save under the little writing-table, where a bright amber-coloured rug of quaint design, from the looms of Kairwan, gave unexpected brilliancy to the dingy groundwork. Solid mahogany bookcases lined the walls. They were filled not with the latest volumes of the Law Reports, but with a vast assortment of modern literature—including many hundreds of French novels and poems. The tops of the bookcases were adorned with vases, jars, and plates without number. "Blue and white" was at that time the rage in society, but Rex had apparently escaped the influence of the prevailing mania. These specimens of pottery of every shape would have shocked the eye of a man of taste, for they glowed with a barbaric richness of colour that would have distressed the frequenters of the

King Street sale-rooms. There were strangely fashioned jugs from Chanak, marvellous bottles and dishes from Cairo, and enormous vases and platters from Tunis and Tripoli. Above these there hung on the walls a great variety of photographs, chiefly of Eastern cities with which Rex, in the course of his many wanderings, had become acquainted; whilst over the mantelpiece there was one beautiful sketch in coloured chalk of a woman's face—an unmistakable portrait, so life-like that it could not fail to attract the eye of the stranger who might enter the apartment.

Changing his dress-coat for a yachtsman's jacket, Rex threw himself into an easy chair, and filling his pipe, proceeded to indulge himself in the profound reverie of the solitary smoker. The air even here was close and oppressive, for it was one of the hottest nights of the year. It may have been from the state of the atmosphere, or it may have been from some inward perturbation; but whatever was the cause, Mansfield was evidently restless and disturbed. The big, powerful man, as he sat there, puffing huge volumes of smoke from his mouth, and glancing now into the empty fireplace, and now at the portrait which hung above it, presented not that picture of rest which might have been expected from his surroundings; but rather the image of one wrestling with some great mental difficulty. More than once he sighed. It was not the gentle, melancholy sigh of the lover, however, which escaped from his lips; but the short, convulsive expiration of the troubled and perplexed man of the world.

In very truth at this moment Rex Mansfield was in sore perplexity. There was nothing tragical—at all events to the eye of the world—in the dilemma in which he found himself. The battle which he was fighting out within his own breast was nothing more than the oldest, the simplest, the most constantly recurring of struggles. He was asked to choose, as most men are once at least in the course of this life, between duty and inclination. On the one side lay the goal of that which had long been his ambition—a settled place in society, with oppor-

tunities for usefulness and advancement in public work such as he could not hope by any ordinary means to attain. On the other hand there lay the rocky up-hill path which he had conceived it to be his duty to take years ago, and in which he had steadily persevered ever since—with small advantage to himself or others, so far as the world could perceive.

Not to leave the reader under any mistaken idea as to the precise nature of the question which this hero of ours was called upon to decide, it may be well to say that it referred to nothing more terrible than his acceptance or rejection of an offer made to him by a relative of a partnership in a vast engineering business in a great northern town. With the acceptance of the offer would come immediately not only wealth far greater than that which he now possessed, though he was by no means poor, but an opening for his political ambition more favourable than any he had dreamed of securing for himself. It had been for years a mere matter of course that a Mansfield should sit for Dulborough, and on his elderly cousin's demise, if he were to accept this offer, he would undoubtedly succeed him in the House.

But on the other hand, a partnership in the Dulborough business meant—what? That he should abandon all those Bohemian habits which had now become as a second nature to him; that he should range himself formally on the side of respectability, that all his life should be laid open to inspection by the curious eyes of the world, and that he should become at once that target for a thousand shafts of envy and malice—a man of mark.

How was it that more than once as he revolved the problem in his troubled mind, there sprang up before his eyes the beautiful face of Gladys Fane? He had almost forgotten the very existence of the girl. She had been as nothing, or less than nothing, to him during the past eighteen months. And yet that proud and radiant countenance, with the dark eyes gleaming with strangely mingled light, persisted in haunting him now, and in thrusting itself, as it were, between him and the question which he was bound to consider with so much

care and circumspection. Ah! if he could only have known that to her, as to him, it was given at that very moment to wrestle in agony of spirit at the parting of the ways; that, like himself, she was even then meeting the great problem of life alone, and that, with no inborn lamp of faith nor borrowed lantern of experience to guide her steps, she was about to make the choice upon which hung the solemn issue of woe or joy!

He went to the window, and drawing back the curtains threw up the sash and looked out. Day was just beginning to break in the eastern sky. The only sound that broke the silence was the chirp of an early sparrow from under the eaves, and the trickle of the water into the old fountain.

"I cannot sleep," he said to himself. "The old fit is on me again, and I suppose I must meet it in the old way."

He replenished his pipe and stole noiselessly from the room out into the court below. But even the spacious squares and passages of the Temple seemed too narrow for his troubled mind to-night; and so he went forth into the street, and soon he was walking westwards along the Embankment, watching the dark river as it slowly flowed seawards toward the solemn dawn.

What is there in the appearance of running water, whether it be the merest rivulet that trickles, a ribbon of silver, through a grassy meadow, or the mighty Danube rolling majestically to its grave in the Euxine, that has so great a fascination for some minds? There are those to whom the noblest river that ever gladdened the eyes of men is nothing more than a cheap carriage-way, or an economical motive power. There are others who judge of it only by its capacity for affording sport—the quantity and quality of the fish that swim in it. Others, again, have a keen eye for the picturesqueness of river scenery; but if you ask them what it is that they admire you will never hear them speak of the water, but only of the cliffs and meadows, the trees and rocks in which it is set as in a framework. But over and above these, there are men and women not a few who seem to have won their way into the very shrine of the river-god, and to have been filled with the very spirit of the Naiads.

For such the river has a distinct significance which is altogether apart from the scenery on its margin, or its capabilities as a highway of commerce. To such it is the symbol of life, with its unseen birth, its steady growth, its progress, checked by many a barrier, its slow pollution as it gains experience in the ways of the world, the inevitable termination of its course in the kind oblivion of the great ocean of death. And these worshippers of the stream resort to it in times of perplexity and gloom; and by some hidden process of magic, whereof no man can tell the secret, claim from it enlightenment and comfort.

Rex Mansfield was one of those to whom no river can ever become commonplace. As he loitered now along the broad pavement of the Embankment, with the great sleeping city lying in its silence on either side of him, the beauty and majesty of the Thames seemed to enter into his soul. And all the pathos of the contrast between its sin-polluted waters here, and those fair upper-reaches lying so near to and yet so far from the huge Babylon that surrounded him, forced itself upon his notice.

Oh, the pity of it! That the stream which bounded forth upon its seaward journey so full of life and light and beauty, so majestic in its spotless purity, should come at last to this sluggish turbid tide, beneath whose murky waves lay hidden a thousand hideous secrets of sin and corruption! It was something, doubtless, to be the river that lapped against the walls of yonder mighty palace, the world-honoured shrine of Liberty and Justice. No man could take from it the glory that belonged to the name of the broad stream upon whose banks the capital of the earth's greatest empire had been founded; and yet, would not the lot of our noble Thames have been more happy if it had been left to find its way in peaceful obscurity to its predestined fate? Nay, was it quite a blessing to be the "heir of all the ages," endowed with the fruits of all the victories wrested by the long generations of toiling, suffering man from the stubborn grasp of Nature, wise with the wisdom of ten thousand years of strife and sorrow, rather than

the naked savage who had once roamed by the marshes on the banks of the river, unconscious of the dignity of manhood, unwitting of the secret of existence?

As these thoughts passed through his mind he looked eastwards, and saw the vast dome of St. Paul's standing out black against the golden sky, in which the morning sun now shone resplendent. Away to the west the thousand windows of Westminster Palace flashed back their welcome to the new-born day.

A new light shone upon his face, and with a lightened heart he went on his way; for the problem that had vexed his soul troubled him no longer. As he climbed the steps at the western end of the Embankment, and looked round upon the silent city, he found himself repeating the lines of "the old man eloquent," who from this same spot had watched the rising of the sun on this same scene:

"Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty :
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning ; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields and to the sky ;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep !
The river glideth at his own sweet will :
Dear God : the very houses seem asleep ;
And all that mighty heart is lying still !"

With elastic step he pursued his way through the silent streets and squares. But soon the tumult of the newly created day begun to break upon his ears. The huge market-carts, laden with the fragrant produce of the fields, rolled past him, bringing a breath of country air into the heart of the city; the workmen went by, whistling on their way to the day's labour; and here and there, even in indolent Belgravia, the curling smoke showed that the children of ease were slowly being awakened to another day of pleasure.

As he came into one fashionable square, his attention was arrested by the most prosaic and commonplace of objects—a

battered London cab, on the roof of which two large boxes had been placed. The cab was standing at a street corner, and looking forth from it was the grey and anxious face of an elderly woman. It must have been something in the woman's face that caused him to regard this commonest of all the sights of our London streets with a closer scrutiny than it seemed to deserve. The woman eyed him with suspicion, and drew back into the interior of the vehicle.

At the same moment he heard the sound of a door being lightly closed in the square, and saw the figure of a young girl, in plain travelling costume, tripping down the steps of one of the houses. What was it that caused his sudden gesture of surprise as that graceful figure approached him? The girl drew her veil over her face when she found that there was a passer-by on the pavement, and hurried from him with averted face. But before she did so, Rex had caught a glimpse of the features he had seen a few hours before at Exminster House. It was Gladys Fane who had glided past him like a ghost in the early morning light, and who the next instant was being driven rapidly away in the cab which he had seen waiting at the corner of the street!





CHAPTER XVII.

EXILE.



THE brilliant sunshine of a September morning was beating down upon one of the fairest cities in the world. It shone upon grey towers, and gilded domes, and marble arches, and bronze statues topping lofty columns, and the quaint mansard roofs of a hundred palaces. It shone down into the wide streets, where the trees were just beginning to lose the fresh greenery of the summer; it poured its flood of light into the vast space of the great square, where the fountains sparkled in the dancing rays, and where even the grim Egyptian Needle, pointing heavenwards from the spot where the curtain had fallen on the great tragedy of the Revolution, seemed to have shared in the universal brightness and gaiety. The whole city was glad to-day; for there was not a cloud in the sky worthy of the name—nothing but the flecks of snow-white fleece that gave depth to the glorious vault of blue to which they formed so vivid and striking a contrast. The very sparrows among the trees chirped to a more lively tune; the children playing on the broad sideways of the Champs Elysées shouted more joyously

than usual ; and their white-capped nursemaids smiled and chattered gaily, even though no lover, possible or probable, happened to be near them. For this was Paris on a bright September morning ; and how could sadness or depression be found in such a city on such a day ?

A young girl threw open the casement of a little room on the fifth floor of a house in the Avenue d'Eylau, and stepped out upon the balcony. From her lofty perch she commanded a noble view of the great city. Close at hand was the Arc de Triomph, with its white face resplendent in the sunshine. Far away across that sea of shining roofs towered the huge black ridge, with its points of gold, that marked the site of the Grand Opera ; and away still further to the right were the weather-beaten towers of Nôtre Dame. Down below, the broad roadway of the avenue was like a river of silver in the dazzling sunlight.

It was still early morning. A baker's man went by with his hand-cart filled with loaves of impossible length ; a little milliner with big handbox on arm tripped nimbly to her daily toil ; a few workmen in blue blouses were labouring at a house which was being built close by ; a neat victoria dashed along under the trees, the glazed hat of the coachman glittering like a mirror in the sunshine. Blue smoke was beginning to curl up into the clear and exhilarating atmosphere from a thousand chimneys ; and even here on the balcony the odour of burning wood—delightful fragrance !—was distinctly perceptible.

It was hardly possible for any one, whatever might be his or her circumstances, to feel depressed in such an atmosphere and amid such surroundings ; and as the girl on the balcony looked around her, now casting her eye down into the street far below, now sweeping with yearning glance across the roofs of the city to where the distant heights showed dark against the sky, her face perceptibly brightened. And yet, if any one who had known the Gladys Fane of a few months back had been told that this pale, worn, suffering girl was she, she would have found it hard to believe the statement.

Little more than six weeks had elapsed since that morning on which Rex Mansfield, returning from his aimless wanderings through the streets, had seen her quit her father's home by stealth. Six weeks! Say rather an eternity. Gladys had begun already to learn the meaning of that phrase which falls trippingly from the tongues of men and women until they make use of it as something more than a polite quotation from a poet. She knew now what are "the years that are not Time's," and as she looked away from this sunny morning of September in Paris to that last July day in London, it seemed to her that centuries had rolled past since then.

Was it not all a dream, she said to herself, as with white hands she pushed back the short dark curls that clustered on her forehead? Could it really be true that it was she, Gladys Fane, who stood there to-day facing the world from her balcony in the Avenue d'Eylau in unfettered freedom, divorced for ever from her home and her country, henceforward always to be exempt from the bitter tyranny of the woman who had made her life so full of wretchedness?

For some weeks she had been ill—ill nigh unto death. During that time of darkness, as she tossed moaning on her bed of fever, in the dreary Brussels hotel in which she had first taken shelter on her flight from England, one ghastly dread had for ever pursued her mind through all the wanderings of delirium. The faithful Mitchell, who had been her sole companion on the rash journey, and who was now her most devoted nurse and attendant, could easily have told what that dread was; for again and again during the long night-watches her patient would cry out in terror for deliverance from some one who was seeking, in ghastly vampire fashion, to drain her very life-blood; and more than once the enemy whom she feared, and by whom she was thus relentlessly pursued, was plainly named by her.

Mr. Fane had been summoned to his daughter's place of refuge within three days of her flight—three dreadful days of horror and suspense to the unhappy man, during which, in his

double desire to recover his child, and, if possible, to prevent publicity being given to the scandal that had so suddenly fallen upon his unspotted name, he had committed as many acts of folly and indiscretion as might have sufficed to neutralize a lifetime of good deeds. It had been shocking to him, during the three weeks in which the fever ran its course, to hear his wife's name fall from the parched and blackened lips of his daughter in such accents of horror that it might have been a fiend of whom the girl was speaking.

As he wandered restlessly through the corridors of the big hotel, where the servants looked pityingly on him as the father of the poor English girl whose brightness and beauty had been so suddenly compelled to surrender to the fierce onslaught of disease, he thanked God fervently that he had not yielded to Lady Jane's wish to accompany him on the journey. For once since their marriage he had asserted himself; and his only companion had been his son.

Naturally enough, before leaving England he had received his wife's instructions as to the mode in which Gladys was to be treated. A "system" which makes no provision for unexpected contingencies is of little value in this world of many surprises, and Lady Jane knew too much of the uncertainties of life and the frailties of human nature not to have provided in her admirable method even for such flat rebellion as that of which Gladys had now been guilty.

There was no chance, fortunately, of putting the excellent woman's suggestions in force during the early days of his sojourn in Brussels. Gladys was in the height of fever and delirium when he was first brought to her bedside; and the=tracts, the penitential hymns, the Prayer-book, and, above all, the long and closely written letter which Lady Jane had intrusted to his care for the benefit of the unrepentant prodigal, were left untouched in a corner of his dressing-case.

Nor, when the girl was convalescent, did her father think it necessary to draw upon the armoury which had thus been provided for him. Mr. Fane was a proud man and a dull one

and like most men who are both proud and dull, he was very weak. But he was not a fool, and he was quite able, after listening to the delirious cries of Gladys and after watching her when she returned to consciousness, to perceive that Lady Jane's "system" in this case at least had proved a failure, and that if he wished to keep his daughter under any conditions whatever, he would need to change entirely the method on which she had hitherto been treated.

And then in the midst of his dismal perplexity, when dragged in one direction by his conviction that, for a time at least, it would be well that the wish of Gladys to reside abroad should be gratified, and in the opposite direction by his desire to satisfy his wife, who insisted upon her being taken to Fanesford as soon as it was safe for her to travel, the Gordian knot was cut by the sharpest, cruellest blow that had ever fallen upon that shallow life of smooth prosperity.

There came to him a letter from Lady Jane, which he read with such a sense of painful bewilderment as he had never experienced before. It was short, and admirably written—as clear, cool, and neat as any of the writer's sayings were. But unmistakable as its meaning was, Mr. Fane for a moment was hardly able to grasp it. Lady Jane intimated that Gladys could no longer be allowed to return to Fanesford, whatever the girl's own wishes on the subject might be. Henceforth her place in her old home must of necessity remain empty, for the sake of those whom she had dishonoured by her conduct. Other arrangements might be, indeed would be, made for her. Lady Jane hinted at the possible transfer of Gladys to the care of an ancient maiden cousin of the Craiggallens of limited means. But upon one point there could be no uncertainty; and that was as to the impossibility of the girl's return to her father's roof.

When Mr. Fane read these words he passed his hand in doubtful fashion across his broad forehead, uncertain as to whether he had really read those clearly written sentences aright. If they meant anything at all, it seemed to him that

they must mean that his daughter had compromised herself so gravely that she was no longer fit to reside in her own home among those nearest to her in kin ; that she was no longer worthy to be the companion of her sister !

The father's soul within the man awoke to life as he grasped the monstrous insinuation. He could hear the feeble, plaintive tones of the girl's voice as she lay in pain and languor in the adjoining room, and they touched a tender chord in his nature which had not been moved for many a long year. He remembered hearing another woman speaking in the same accents of weariness and weakness—the woman whom he had loved better than any other human creature, and whose image a thousand Lady Janes could not have effaced from his memory. In bitter wrath and indignation he spurned the vile thought that the daughter of the woman who had been the idol of his youth, the girl who had nestled close to his heart in her tender infancy and who, amid all her waywardness and folly, had still remained dear to him, was deserving of the cruel sentence passed upon her by Lady Jane.

He could not go to his child, who was even now slowly emerging from the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and lay bare to her the cruel suspicions by which some enemy had succeeded in poisoning the mind of Lady Jane. What he must do would be to write at once to his wife to crush out of her mind the ideas by which the very name of Fane was dishonoured. Poor soul ! Eighteen months of matrimony might surely have sufficed to teach him that it was not in the power of such as himself to remove rooted impressions from the minds of women like his wife.

He took up the letter once more, and his eye fell upon a postscript which he had not in the first instance observed.

"I enclose the paragraph from one of those dreadful papers in which the sad, sad affair is described ; and I am sure that after reading it you will see the utter impossibility of allowing dear Gladys to return to Fanesford. My long experience in the affairs of this life has taught me that when matters

have reached such a climax as this, the poor victim of her own ill-regulated impulses must, in very kindness' sake, be allowed to retire into obscurity."

Within the envelope, unseen by Mr. Fane, there lay snugly a small scrap of printed paper cut from some unnamed journal.

He drew it forth with trembling fingers, and his lips grew white and dry as he unfolded it.

Men, even the bravest of them, are not ashamed to confess to a momentary sensation not far distant from terror when they find themselves in presence of some potent agent of destruction by means of which the life of some one dear to themselves has been attempted or destroyed. The world, as it spins onwards "down the ringing grooves of change," has in nothing made greater advances than in the perfection of the means of slaying. The "villainous saltpetre" of the old friar was terrible enough in its day, but it has long since gone out of date, and strange compounds of harmless appearance and simple character are vying with each other for the first place in the race for supremacy in destructive power. But there is an agent of destruction which has come into existence among us, not certainly within the memory of living men, but within a period that is as nothing compared with the length of the history of our race, that surpasses any curious product of the laboratory, even nitro-glycerine itself, in its deadly energy. It, too, is not repulsive in appearance, and it even enjoys a large measure of popularity—popularity which it undoubtedly does its best to deserve. This is not the place in which to run a-muck at "society journals." These society journals are neither greatly better nor greatly worse than other journals with which Englishmen have been acquainted for a hundred years past. Their proprietors are by no means fiends who are bent upon scattering moral dynamite broadcast in society. They exist to supply a distinct public demand, and probably, with one or two exceptions, they supply that demand with the least possible injury to the world at large. But nevertheless the fact remains that, under certain circumstances, a newspaper paragraph written in igno-

rance or in thoughtlessness, in jest, or merely to fill a corner of a page, may be more terrible in its effects upon individuals and families than the most deadly of our modern explosives would be.

This was what Mr. Fane read on the scrap of paper enclosed by his wife :—

“What is this strange story that I hear about a young lady, whose portrait figured prominently on the walls of Burlington House this season, and whose high social rank and great personal charms have made her a general favourite? Can it be true that the daughter of one of the most distinguished commoners in England, a man holding high political place, and of ancient lineage, has so far forgotten herself as to quit her father’s house surreptitiously? It is said that the companion of her flight is a mere domestic who happened to attract her fancy. Whatever the details may be, I believe there is no doubt of the elopement, which has cast a gloom over society in a northern county.”

“Merciful heavens !” cried Mr. Fane, crumpling up the scrap of paper in his hand, and then flinging it on the floor and grinding it beneath his heel, “everybody will think that she has run away with a groom or a footman !”

He understood it all now. He saw why it was that Lady Jane positively declined to receive Gladys again in her own home; and, alas ! that it should have to be said, amid the bitter rage and indignation which surged in his heart, he was himself conscious of a certain degree of sympathy with his wife’s scruples. It was not that Gladys was not as free from stain as on the day of her birth. Upon that point no shadow of a doubt crossed his mind. But it was that in the eyes of the world, of the shallow, evil-thinking, censorious, unforgetting society of the day, she stood accused of conduct which could never be forgiven.

What did her innocence matter in such a case? And of what good would it be to attempt to establish it? Apart from the fact that the foul insinuation conveyed by the paragraph

was put in such a form that no court of law would regard it as a libel, there lay the still more terrible truth that the world of to-day adopts as its motto the cynical phrase *qui s'excuse s'accuse*, and that the more a woman seeks to clear her character from unfounded imputations the stronger will be the belief that she must be in the wrong.

No ; Mr. Fane, like his wife, felt that there was but one course open to Gladys. Her heedless step had involved her already in the bitterest of consequences. It was no longer possible for her, in presence of that vile paragraph, which must already be circulating in a thousand country houses and in every club, to go back to England as though nothing had occurred. All that she could do now was to hide her head until the storm of tittle-tattle had passed by. "It is not the sin ; it is the being found out that is the crime now-a-days." And even where there may have been no sin, it is enough for the world to believe that the sinner has been unmasked to damn him or her in the eyes of society.

If Mr. Fane had been a strong man he would no doubt have reasoned differently. He would have felt that his daughter at this moment demanded his love, his care, his tender and chivalrous championship, more than she had ever done before. But, alas ! he was weak ; and his mind was poisoned by the social theories of the class to which he belonged. He knew that, from the point of view of a narrow and selfish worldliness, Lady Jane was right ; and Fanesford was at present no place for his child.

Perhaps even then his affection for her might have led him to insist upon braving the scandal and the gossip of the crowd. But there remained the fact of the relations of Gladys with her stepmother. He knew now, if he had never known it before, that the girl's life, with such a shadow resting upon it, would be absolutely intolerable if spent in the company of Lady Jane. Even his torpid imagination was quick enough to foresee the multitudinous acts of petty tyranny by which his wife would now, if she were brought into contact with Gladys, bring home

to her the terrible consequences of the error she had committed. No ; Fanesford could never again be a home to the bright, beautiful daughter of the house who had so long been the pride of his eye. All that remained was to spare her, as far as might be possible, the knowledge of the irretrievable character of the step she had taken when, in that evil hour, she fled from the shelter of her home, and to do what might yet be possible to make the remainder of her life happy and smooth.

And so it came to pass that when convalescence had fairly set in, and Gladys was once more able to travel without risk, her father took her to Paris, and placed her there in charge of a lady who had been recommended to him as thoroughly trustworthy—the widow of a clergyman named Carmichael, who had made her abode in the midst of the Anglo-American colony of the Champs Elysées.

As she stood on the balcony of her new home in the Avenue d'Eylau, rejoicing in the sunshine and in the breeze which fanned her wasted cheek, the girl's heart was full of those "long, long thoughts" that can never be fully expressed in words. The sharp illness which had reduced her strength had done something to rob her spirits of their old buoyancy. She could hardly believe, indeed, that two years ago she had been the gay and thoughtless girl whose whole life was like a summer song of joy. It was far easier to trace her identity with the reckless beauty of the great world, whose high spirits were in no small measure assumed to hide her real misery. The Gladys of the last twelve months was not so far removed from her but that she could understand her actions and sympathize with her even in her follies and indiscretions ; but the Gladys of the earlier days, upon whose path never a shadow of sorrow or pain had fallen, was a creature upon whom in her retrospect she looked back in sheer wonder and bewilderment, marvelling that the earth could ever have held a being so innocent of knowledge of the bitter cup of life.

But the past was dead and buried, and she was free ; free to shape a new course for herself untrammelled by the bonds

which had been so irksome to her in her old life. This was, after all, the predominant thought in her mind, as she stood there upon the balcony, a picture of subdued and pensive loveliness. Did she regret it? As she looked back at the brilliant panorama of social life in which she had been one of the moving figures, did she not sigh for the glitter and the fashion of the old times? Had she no longing for the distinction and the homage which had once been hers?

Strange as it may seem, there was not a single thought in her heart that savoured of regret. She felt like a bird set free from the gilded cage behind whose bars she would have perished of a vain longing for the liberty which was denied to her. Even Fanesford no longer seemed to have any interest for her, or any part in her lot. She had shed tears of real distress when the faithful Mitchell had left her on the previous day; but the knowledge that her old friend was returning to Northumberland, and to the spot where she herself had been born, induced not even the faintest desire on her part to return to the familiar place. Her life there was like a dream to her—a bright and happy dream for the most part—but one which had ended in a nightmare vision so terrible that she was glad to have been awakened from it. No; from the first she had been an alien in the household of the Fanes, a changeling whom some malignant fairy had chosen to place in the spot where, of all others, she was least at home. Some half-developed instinct within her seemed to say that she was not even English in nature; and then the girl's thoughts ran back to that ancestress of hers of foreign birth, who had perished so tragically amid the solemn splendour of life at Fanesford, and she felt that it must be this woman's spirit and temperament which she had inherited.

But now all the romance of a life of independence and freedom lay before her! She looked out on the beautiful city with a rising sense of exhilaration in her heart. Here at least she would be for ever free from the fetters of social life which had chafed and galled her in yonder fog-enshrouded island.

No Mrs. Grundy would henceforth spy her every action ; no Lady Jane would chill her heart with her icy aphorisms. She had descended from the social rank which she had hated and secretly despised ; and her way henceforth would lie amongst people whose lives were at least genuine and simple, who knew the pleasure of honest labour and the glory of hardly-won success.

"A penny for your thoughts, my dear," said a pleasant voice, suddenly breaking in upon her reverie.

The speaker was a lady whose age lay somewhere very near to forty, and whose comely figure and bright kindly face would have attracted admiration anywhere.

Gladys turned toward her with a faint smile.

"I was thinking, Mrs. Carmichael, how delightful it was to be here instead of in England."

"Thank you for the pretty compliment. Well, I hope that you will always think as well of Paris, and of the Avenue d'Eylau in particular, as you seem to do to-day ; but I have no wish to keep you for ever in exile. Ah, my dear, the time will come when all the sunniness of Paris will seem to you dull in comparison with the love-light of dear old England." Mrs. Carmichael sighed gently, and putting an arm round the slim waist of Gladys kissed her affectionately.

"But you have been here a long time, have you not, Mrs. Carmichael ; and yet I am sure you do not seem to be weary of the place?"

"Weary of it ! who could be weary of our beautiful Paris, I should like to know ? Why, do you know that when the siege took place, I nearly broke my heart over the sufferings of the poor people. I was safe in England at the time, and yet I felt that I would have given anything to be able to get back again to my little room here. It seemed almost mean and cowardly on my part to be away from the place I loved when such terrible things were happening there. But for all that you will find sooner or later, my dear, as everybody else does, that there is no place like home. What is the old Scotch

song?—‘Hame, hame wad I be.’ That is the feeling that comes into one’s heart even in Paris when the dark fit is upon one, and everything seems strange and sad.”

“But you have a great many friends here, have you not?” said Gladys.

“Well, for an Englishwoman in Paris who does not go into society, and who does not keep a *pension*, I am fairly provided with friends.”

“And they are nice people, I am sure,” said Gladys, with a bright smile.

Mrs. Carmichael patted her cheek. “Come, my dear; pay no compliments to my friends until you see them. You told me last night that you wished to see no one again whom you had ever known in England, unless it were your father, your brother, and your sister. I thought at the time that it was rather a dreadful thing for a young lady to say. And besides, let me tell you that your wish will certainly be disappointed. Even if there are none of your old acquaintances among my own friends, you will be sure to meet some of them in Paris sooner or later.”

Gladys made a slight grimace; and it was with something of her old spirit that she answered—

“That is the very last thing in the world I wish. You know I have crossed the stream and burnt my boats now. I am going to forget, if I can, that I was ever an Englishwoman.”

“Ah, some day you will feel more proud of your English name and English birth than of anything else in the world,” replied the other. “But, come; the coffee is waiting for us, and no true Parisienne ever neglects her first breakfast.”



CHAPTER XVIII.

“NONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE.”



THE first days Gladys spent in that little *appartement* on the fifth floor in the Avenue d'Eylau she ever afterwards reckoned among the happiest in her life. After the terrible storm there had come a calm. She felt something of that placid delight which comes to all convalescents who have just passed through a severe illness—the delight of growing strength, and of a renewed power of enjoyment. As she improved physically, and the roses came back to her cheeks, and the sharp facial angles were once more rounded into lines of beauty, she experienced all the joy of mere living; the sweet sensuous pleasures that are brought home to the spirit of the restored invalid by the sunshine and the fresh air of heaven, by the scent of the flowers and the softness of the carpet of green-sward on which it is bliss once more to be allowed to tread.

But it was from something far more terrible than any mere ailment of the flesh that Gladys was now emerging. She had passed through the sharp crisis of a great moral conflict; and now, as she took her afternoon walk down the broad path of

the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, she had much of the feeling of the sailor who, after passing through the stress and peril of shipwreck, finds himself cast up, alone and naked it may be but still unharmed, upon the hospitable strand of some strange island, where all things may be novel to him, and yet all wear a gracious and friendly aspect.

She had, as she herself declared, crossed the stream and burnt her boats. Henceforth there could be no going back for her. Perhaps in these earliest days of liberty, when her whole frame seemed to be thrilled through and through with the delightful consciousness of freedom, she did not quite realize how completely this was the case. Young hearts, when they take the fatal step in life, the step that can never be retaken, can seldom quite bring home to their consciousness the fact that there is in very truth no going back. Gladys had no wish to go back. She turned from the past, with its mingled storms and sunshines, to the quiet present—the new life upon which she was entering—with a sense as of the renewal of her youth; and as she thought of her old home, and of the varied scenes in which she had once played her part, she rejoiced at the thought that the door had been closed for ever upon that chapter in her life, and that instead of it she had entered upon this new and fresh stage of existence.

Despite her function as chaperone, and her long residence in Paris, Mrs. Carmichael had no wish to subject Gladys to the restraints to which unmarried Frenchwomen are compelled to submit; and the girl was allowed to take her walks by herself when her friend, as sometimes happened, was unable to accompany her. She had seen something of Paris before. But all her former visits had been paid in dull state, when maids, a courier, and a footman had formed part of the depressing expedition, the members of which spent a few days at an aristocratic hotel in the Place Vendôme on their way to or from Switzerland or Italy. It was something quite new to her now to be allowed to wander at her own sweet will about the noble avenues that radiate from the Arc de Triomphe.

She even found, on the occasions on which she had the society of her new companion, a novel pleasure in looking into the windows of the splendid shops on the boulevards ; and more than once when she was by herself she entered one or other of the city churches. Curiosity only impelled her to this step. And yet it was not possible for such a girl as Gladys to find herself in one of these great churches, among the kneeling women, and the silent, sad-faced men who seemed to have found refuge here from the troubles of the world outside ; it was not in her nature to listen to the low reverberation of the priest's voice as it sounded from the distant altar, or to hear the sweet music of the choristers, without being moved and softened. She came at last to find a soothing sense of restfulness in these visits to the ever-open churches, and the Madeleine became one of her favourite places of resort.

But in the sunny autumn afternoons she loved best to walk in the shady alleys of the Champs Elysées, where a thousand children were playing together ; where the white-capped bonnes knitted placidly as they looked after their young charges, or gossiped together of the tempers of their respective mistresses ; where good-humoured, lounging louts in blue coats represented the glory of the French Army, and where the shrill cry of the Parisian copy of Mr. Punch never failed to attract an eager host of admirers of all ages and apparently of all ranks.

Quick as ever to detect the humours of the scenes through which she passed, she did not fail now to note the characteristic aspects of this new society into which she had so suddenly been thrown. How different this cheerful natural gaiety was from anything she had seen in England ! The absence of the distressing self-consciousness of the Engländer made these men and women seem graceful and refined in manner, even although at every turn they indulged in little tricks that would have revolted English people who made no pretensions to politeness. Gladys could not shut her eyes to the fact that there was much of coarseness in the ways of the race among whom she had now taken up her abode ; but, on the other hand, this coarse-

ness seemed curiously remote from the vulgarity to be found in an English mob ; and she found herself far more at home in this afternoon throng in the Champs Elysées, than she had ever felt in the midst of a crowd in London or Northumberland.

Above all, there was the delightful difference of climate, that seemed to act as a universal stimulant, raising the spirits, both of natives and strangers, far above the level to which she had been accustomed in damp and foggy England. It seemed to her that merely to breathe was a joy here ; and she ceased to marvel at the good humour and contentment depicted upon all the faces around her. With wonderful quickness—the swift intuition of the artistic temperament—she found herself entering into Parisian ways not merely of speech and manner, but of thought and attitude.

"I declare," Mrs. Carmichael said to her one day, with an amused air, after hearing Gladys expound her views upon some question of taste, "you are becoming extravagantly French in your ideas. If you do not take care, my dear, you will soon become, as they say here, '*plus royaliste que le roi*.'"

"But that does not seem to me to be anything to be dreaded," replied Gladys, quickly. "I have thrown in my lot with these people, and I wish to become as one of them."

"That you will never be, however much you may try, my dear. Don't look vexed because I say so. I know that you have the taste of a Frenchwoman in dress, and that your figure and your hair remind one of Spain ; but don't suppose that a free-mannered, independent, proud-hearted English girl, who has known all the liberty and activity of a life at home, can ever assimilate herself so completely to the nature of the people here as to become indistinguishable from them. And if I were you I should not make the attempt. As an Englishwoman you have privileges here which no unmarried Frenchwoman would dare to aspire to."

September, as all the world knows, is a month when Paris is subjected to an invasion of strangers. These visitors, English, American, and German, swarm in the hotels and *cafés* ; they

make themselves conspicuous in the theatres and concert-rooms, and they may even be seen being driven like sheep from point to point of the great city, under the sharp superintendence of some "personal conductor."

It afflicted Gladys not a little to meet groups of unmistakable English men and women clad in the rough, comfortable, but too conspicuous garb of the travelling Briton, in every place of public resort. Perhaps she was somewhat prejudiced, and a little embittered at this period of her life. She forgot the better side of that English character of which she knew so much; and just as in the past she had ridiculed Lostwithiel because of the clothes he wore, forgetting altogether the goodness of the heart that was beating under that outer integument of huge-patterned homespun, so now she turned with something like disgust from the tourists whose dress was by no means in keeping with Parisian ideas of taste and fashion, and whose incessant cry of "garson" was positively terrible to her sensitive ear.

It was not among these representatives of the lower middle class that she was likely to meet any of her old acquaintances, and she moved about among them in the walks of the Bois de Boulogne and elsewhere, confident that by them at least she would never be taken for anything but a Frenchwoman.

But she forgot that though English "society" in September is not as a rule to be found on the banks of the Seine, a few stray members of the august body may at any time of the year be encountered there; and one day, when she had been nearly a month an occupant of the fifth floor in the Avenue d'Eylau, her illusions as to the seclusion of a life in Paris were rudely shattered.

It was a bright afternoon, and she was taking her usual walk in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe. Ahead of her were three ladies and a gentleman, whose dress, though free from the ordinary tourist vulgarity, was nevertheless unmistakably English. As Gladys, with her swift, elastic step, was overtaking them, they suddenly turned and began to walk towards her; and in a moment she saw that they were old acquaintances of

hers in London. The eldest of the ladies was Mrs. Arnott, the wife of a country gentleman, and her companions were her son and two daughters, with all of whom Gladys had been on terms of friendship in town.

To her the unexpected meeting was an intense mortification, for she had no wish to encounter any one who could upon any pretext question her as to her recent doings or present position. If she could have done so without flagrant rudeness she would have passed the Arnotts without recognizing them; but she was conscious that all their eyes were upon her; that the girls, indeed, were regarding her with open-mouthed wonder and curiosity, and that the son of the house was looking at her with a glance that struck her in a moment as being singularly sheepish.

There was no possibility of ignoring the meeting, and nerv-
ing herself for the coming ordeal, she greeted Mrs. Arnott with the bright smile which was so well known to all her friends. She could hardly believe the evidence of her own senses when she saw that lady, after regarding her for a single instant with a cold, stern stare, pass on without vouchsafing the slightest acknowledgment of her greeting.

For a moment she stood still, stunned and bewildered. The present was an experience altogether new in her life. She was positively unable to realize the fact that she had been deliberately "cut" in this pronounced and insolent fashion by those who so lately had professed to be among her friends. She fancied that there must have been some great mistake as to identity on her side or on theirs, and she looked after the retreating party doubtful as to whether she ought not to return and make herself known to them. But at that moment she saw that Louie Arnott, the younger daughter, a good-natured girl of twenty, who had been her particular friend in the family, was looking back and telegraphing to her in an affectionate though mysterious fashion. The others were walking steadily away from her in stolid dignity.

There had been no mistake then! and she, Miss Fane of

Fanesford, had been thus outrageously insulted in the public street by one whom she had always supposed to be a lady! All the latent pride of her nature was stung into active life by the slight, so cruel and unexpected, to which she had been subjected. She forgot the fact that she had herself sacrificed the position which was hers by right of birth, that she was no longer a figure of note in the world of fashion, but a stray Englishwoman living *au cinquième* in a French boarding-house. Everything passed from her mind in the tumult of bitter wrath which filled it at this moment of pain and humiliation. She walked quickly onwards; hardly knowing whither she went; conscious only of the sharp venom of the sting which had been inflicted upon her.

It might have been five minutes after this encounter when, as, with high colour and fast-beating heart, she was walking down the broad pavement of the Champs Elysées, anxious to get as far as possible from the scene of her humiliation, she was startled to hear herself called by her name.

She looked round, for a moment believing that the Arnotts must have followed her in order to make some apology for their extraordinary conduct.

"Gladys Fane!" cried the voice once more; and then she saw that it came from an old lady, richly dressed in velvet and furs, who occupied the back seat in a handsome carriage, whilst the front was divided between an unmistakable "lady companion" and a very fat pug.

A thrill of dismay ran through the girl's frame. "Good gracious!" she ejaculated softly, "Mrs. Wybrowe, as I'm a living woman," and then she went forward to the carriage.

"I knew it was you," cried the old lady in the furs. "I saw you half a mile off nearly, and I said to Miss Carr, 'If that isn't Gladys Fane I'm an old fool.' Knew you by your walk you know, my dear. There's not a girl in all England has a walk like you. And so you're here, are you? And now, how do you like it? A Paris *pension* better than Fanesford—hey? Have you fallen in love with any of the 'mossoos'; or

Have any of them fallen in love with you? Why, I declare you look quite stout and well, and handsomer than ever; although they say you nearly died at Brussels."

It was as a shrill croak that these words were ejaculated at lightning speed by the old lady. But there was unmistakable good-will in her manner, and there was a humorous twinkle in her keen eye of greenish-grey, that proved that she did not talk nonsense without knowing it.

"Come, get in," she continued, the footman having opened the door of the carriage; "now that I have found you, I'm not going to lose you in a hurry. Where shall we drive to first? Is there a sheep-dog whose leave we must ask for you to come with me? I suppose so. Your father's a fool, my dear—a perfect fool; but not such a fool as to leave you absolutely alone in Paris, I hope. Come, there's plenty of room beside me. Don't stand staring there, like a big baby; I want to get my drive before the sun sets. And what's the matter with you, my dear? I declare you look as glum as if some one had just picked your pocket!"

Gladys could say nothing in reply to this torrent of words. She contented herself with giving the number of the house in the Avenue d'Eylau, and then she took her seat beside Mrs. Wybrowe, and opposite the companion and the pug, wondering much to herself what was to be the upshot of this strange and unexpected meeting.

Mrs. Wybrowe was a lady of vast wealth, much social importance, and known eccentricity. But to Gladys she was something more than all this. She was the aunt of Lord Lostwithiel, the only sister of his mother. She had, in fact, been the guardian of the Earl during his minority, after his mother's death, and before he inherited the title. Though our heroine had always felt a certain degree of dread of the lady's sharp tongue, she had nevertheless felt that they had something in common. More than once Mrs. Wybrowe, during that dreadful time at Fanesford a year before, had driven over from the Abbey and endeavoured to release Gladys from the vigilant

control of Lady Jane. But even if it had been possible for the girl to take advantage of the old lady's offer, she would hardly have cared to do so, owing to the relationship in which she stood to Lord Lostwithiel. Mrs. Wybrowe had never concealed her admiration for the Fanesford beauty; and Gladys knew perfectly well that she not only desired to see her the wife of her nephew, but that she was aware that it was not the fault of Lostwithiel that they were not already married. It was, therefore, with not a little embarrassment that the girl seated herself beside the plain-spoken dowager in her carriage.

So long as their drive lasted, however, the conversation was wholly free from personal allusions. Mrs. Wybrowe was a lady who hated French people and their ways, and who had not a good word to say for France or anything therein, although she now usually wintered at Nice.

"Look at those ridiculous women, dressed like dolls, my dear! Where on earth are their back-bones and their ribs, I should like to know? Shouldn't wonder if they haven't got any. I came this morning on a regiment of soldiers walking across the Place de la Concorde. Why, I declare your Fanesford 'noodles' would have beaten them into fits."

The Fanesford noodles were a corps of Yeomanry, much derided in the district because of their unmilitary qualities.

"Everything is alike in this country. It's all sham from beginning to end. Look at these houses. They are not stone; they're only stucco. And the people—what; my dear! you think them polite! Never made a greater mistake in your life. Your Frenchman is the greediest, nastiest, most ill-bred rogue in existence. Polite! Yes, from their lips outwards. They lift their hats to you, and then tumble all your belongings upon the floor of the railway carriage, so that they may put their nasty, shining boots on the cushion. One of them sat on poor 'King' there the other day, and only swore when he heard the poor darling howl. If I'd had my umbrella in my hand I should have struck him."

Gladys had often before heard the good lady's views upon

the subject of the Gaul and his iniquities. But never before to-day had she felt in honour bound to appear as the champion of her adopted country. She replied with spirit and humour to Mrs. Wybrowe's sallies.

"What," said the latter, "you going to be a Frenchwoman! Fiddle-de-dee, Gladys Fane. Better say at once you mean to be a negress. You couldn't do it, my dear. It's not in human nature, English human nature at least, to fall into the ways of these nasty, yellow-skinned, frog-eating, bowing and scraping, over-dressed apes. Thank goodness, they'll eat themselves up before long. You should have seen what miserable, starved wretches they looked when I came over in seventy-one, after the siege. Never saw anything so funny in my life as the change in the *concierge* at the hotel between then and the time I'd seen him last. The poor old creature had lost ten stones, at least." And Mrs. Wybrowe laughed delightedly at the recollection.

The hotel which she patronized was one of those select establishments in the Rue de Rivoli, so completely monopolized by travelling English people, that over their portals ought to be written the words, "No Frenchman need apply." Here Gladys found herself sitting down to an excellent dinner—for Mrs. Wybrowe believed in the virtues of the table—a few hours after her meeting with her old friend in the Champs Elysées. No sooner was dinner over than Miss Carr, on some convenient plea of a headache, or what not, retired, and the girl and the old lady were left alone.

"So you have done what I always feared you would do, my dear," said Mrs. Wybrowe, when they had the room to themselves.

Gladys had known from the first that sooner or later the conversation would turn upon this topic. Yet all the same, now that it had been mentioned she had no words with which to answer her voluble friend.

"Yes; I told your father that he was doing his best to ruin you. But I've no patience with men. They're all fools, I

think ; and certainly your father is no exception to the rule. Just to think of his marrying that dreadful old woman, and then leaving her to lord it over you."

"Don't talk about it, Mrs. Wybrowe," said Gladys. "It is all at an end now, thank heaven ; and I am free."

"Free ! Is that the way in which you look at it ? Yes, you are free. So is the man who drowns himself to avoid being hanged. Don't you know what it is that you have done, my dear ?" she continued, looking not unkindly in the girl's face.

"Of course I do. I have left home, and taken to a life of what you would call solitary independence, Mrs. Wybrowe ; because, unfortunately, I am not able to agree with my step-mother."

"But do you not know that, in taking this step, you have cut yourself off from society ? Has no one told you of the dreadful things they are saying of you ? Haven't you even had a hint about it ?" .

Gladys looked bewildered. "I don't know what you mean," she said. "What *can* they say about me, except that I have run away from home ?"

"Heavens ! The child is as innocent as a baby. Have you found no difference," the old lady continued, with pitiless persistence, "in the way people look at you ?"

Then there flashed upon Gladys the recollection of her meeting with the Arnotts that afternoon, and of the cold, stern, stare of the mother, the averted faces of the others. This, then, was what that strange *rencontre* meant ! She was no longer to be looked upon as fit to associate with people who still held their own in the eyes of the world : and all because she had quarrelled with Lady Jane, and had found herself unable to live any longer under the same roof with her.

Mrs. Wybrowe read the girl like a book. "I see how it is," she said. "You forgot, poor child, that you were not living on a desert island, where there was no one to notice what you were doing, or in a palace of truth, where every one must know the exact facts and there was no possibility of misunderstanding-

ing them. Before you are much older, Gladys Fane, you will have found out that in this world it is not what people are, but what they are believed to be, that settles their fate."

"And am I, then, believed to be something so very bad?" asked Gladys in proud tones.

"Humph!" responded Mrs. Wybrowe, with something very like a snarl. "Of course, people must have their say when a girl in your position acts as you have done; and you ought to know without being told that the things they say are not pleasant. Still, the damage that has been done should not be beyond undoing, if you will only act wisely."

"If you mean by acting wisely going back to Fanesford, that is out of the question!"

Mrs. Wybrowe shrugged her shoulders. "Quite out of the question, so long as Lady Jane is there, my dear, I know. But she has got heart disease, and may not stand in your way so long as you suppose. I'm not talking of Fanesford, however; I was thinking of the Abbey. You know you can go there whenever you like—even now."

Mrs. Wybrowe was a very acute and a well-intentioned woman. She prided herself upon her knowledge of human nature and of the world. But she could hardly have committed a more deplorable blunder than when she added the two last words to the sentence she had just uttered.

A proud bitter smile broke upon the face of Gladys like a gleam of wintry sunshine on the ice.

"Even now!" she repeated. "No, Mrs. Wybrowe, you cannot think so badly of me as to suppose that the girl who would not marry Lord Lostwithiel when she was still Gladys Fane, of Fanesford, would do so now, when she seems to be regarded as an outcast by the very people who were proud to know her three months ago."

"Poor Frank!" said the old lady. "He would come back from America to-morrow if he thought there was any chance for him."

"Do you know," cried Gladys, unheeding this last remark,

"I was cut, deliberately cut, just before I met you, by the Arnotts?"

And then she poured forth the whole of the bitter story into the ears of her friend.

When she had completed the recital, Mrs. Wybrowe said, in gentler accents than she had yet used, "My poor dear, you want some one to stand beside you. Why not come with me now to Bellagio? I shall be there for a month before going to Florence on my way to Nice. You will be better with me than with this good woman in the Avenue d'Eylau, whom nobody knows. No one will believe what people are saying about you so long as they know that you are with me."

But Gladys, though she appreciated the kindness and affection of the offer, refused to yield to it. Deeply as she had been wounded by the incident of the afternoon, she felt, in the pride of her conscious innocence, strong enough to defy all the slander single-handed. Besides, her mind was now too much set upon the new life on which she had entered—the life, as she had called it, of "solitary independence"—to be readily turned aside. Mrs. Wybrowe's proposal had no attraction for her; and that lady had to be content with the promise of Gladys to meet her in Nice, where it had already been arranged by Mr. Fane that Mrs. Carmichael was to take her during the winter.

The old lady was to leave Paris the next evening: so she took an affectionate leave of our heroine.

"No, do not come to see me to-morrow before I start," she said. "I am always in such a frightful temper when I am going to travel, that we should be certain to quarrel." And then she kissed Gladys, and sent her to the carriage which was waiting for her in the courtyard.

The next evening a small parcel was brought to the Avenue d'Eylau. On opening it, Gladys found one of those neat morocco cases which no woman can handle quite unmoved by pleasure and curiosity. Within the case was a magnificent bracelet. It was a plain broad band of gold, and inscribed on

this band, in letters formed by diamonds of large size, was the motto of the noblest of the world's orders of chivalry, "*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*"

There was a scrap of paper in the case, on which was written in a crabbed hand—"For Gladys Fane, with an old woman's love and blessing. Wear it always."





CHAPTER XIX.

A PRINCE TO THE RESCUE.



LADYS did not recover her spirits after her meeting with the Arnotts so soon as might have been expected. The very kindness which had been shown to her by Mrs. Wybrowe only seemed to deepen the impression which had been made upon her mind by the insult she had received from those who had once professed to be her friends. Indeed, it was Mrs. Wybrowe's explanation which had first opened her eyes to the significance of her reception by the Arnotts. Her first reflection when she realized the fact that she was considered to have lost caste by the step she had taken was one of intense amusement. The notion that she was to be looked upon as unfit to associate with the dull respectabilities among whom she had lived so long tickled her imagination not a little.

But by and by she began to feel that this was hardly a laughing matter ; and a feeling of passionate indignation swept in upon her soul as she realized the light in which she was now manifestly regarded in a certain section of society. She was — not one to show what she felt upon the subject, either by a —

reckless defiance of the world's opinion or by retiring into seclusion. The purity of her nature kept her from giving way to the one temptation—strongly as it pressed upon her—whilst pride effectually saved her from yielding to the other.

No ; she would continue to move about freely in Paris, and to be as much as was possible the Gladys of old days ; but she would take care never again to expose herself to a rebuff like that which she had experienced on the occasion of her meeting with the Arnotts. No one should say that she was eager to secure the countenance of those who had known her in her former life.

And in the meantime there was a great deal to amuse her and occupy her mind in her present position.

Mrs. Carmichael belonged to what may be called the genteel order of Bohemians. She was but moderately endowed with the world's goods ; but she had refined tastes, and had surrounded herself by a little circle of intellectual friends. There came to her tiny *salon* on the fifth floor all the "best people" who frequented the big American *pension* which occupied the lower part of the house ; and there came also certain English artists and musicians who were studying in Paris, or who had taken up their residence there, and were pursuing their callings under more favourable conditions than those which would have surrounded them in London. There was not one of all the little company to be found from time to time in that *appartement* in the Avenue d'Eylau who was rich, unless it chanced to be some travelling American. They knew nothing of titles, or of the great world of fashion, either on the banks of the Seine or on those of the Thames. But they were clever, bright, cultivated ; and Gladys found herself strongly interested in them almost before she was aware.

It was quite a new experience of life, that which was now afforded to her. She was herself poor among the poor ; for her father had contented himself with allowing her simply the sum she had formerly received for her dresses and pocket-money—and a few hundreds a year, though sufficient for the

wants of a single young lady in a boarding-house, did not leave much margin, after the satisfaction of necessary expenses, for the luxuries to which she had been accustomed. But in her very poverty she found a charm. It was altogether new to her to have to think of the cost of any article which pleased her fancy before purchasing it, and there was something that struck her as delightfully quaint in the planning and contriving which she shared with Mrs. Carmichael on the engrossing subject of ways and means. Possibly the quaintness would not have seemed quite so delightful if the experience had not been a new one to her.

Among the new friends whom she made was a certain Mrs. Lorrimer, a pretty little American, blessed with a good-natured husband of moderate means, who was enjoying himself in Europe after the excitement of a financial crash in New York.

Mrs. Lorrimer attached herself to Gladys with all the ardour of a young lover, and very soon it came to pass that the two were inseparable companions in the streets and the shops, where the American lady always found an extraordinary amount of business to occupy her. The originality of Mrs. Lorrimer's speech touched the girl's sense of humour, and she soon discovered that an endless source of enjoyment was to be found in her comments upon the institutions of Europe.

"Oh, my! Miss Fane," she said one day, "do you know I *am* so glad that you haven't got a title. When I came across I didn't know what on airth I should do when I met a lord or a lady. Seemed to me as if I was bound to knock them down, anyhow; just to show I was as good as they were. I felt quite queer when I landed at Liverpool, and thought I was in a land where there were lords. Sakes alive! but if I were English I don't know how I could breathe for thinking there were better people than myself in the country."

The old bright smile always flashed across the face of Gladys when Mrs. Lorrimer began to hold forth upon this her favourite theme. Nor could she resist the temptation to banter the worthy, kind-hearted little lady, whose dreadful earnestness

the subject of lords was one of the distinguishing features of her character.

"Yes, it is really terrible—is it not, Mrs. Lorrimer?—to think of the bondage in which we English people are placed to the Peerage. But you see we have got used to it; so we try to bear our hard fates with meekness."

"Now, do tell, Miss Fane. I never spoke to a real lord. Is he nice? I mean can he say pretty things to English girls; or does he keep 'em all for the born ladies?" continued Mrs. Lorrimer, pursuing her inquiries into the natural history of lords.

Gladys laughed outright. "Oh! as to saying pretty things, I'm afraid they are not much good at that. It's the younger sons of lords who have mastered that art. I fear the average lord is rather stupid—unless he happens to meet one of your young countrywomen. It's astonishing how quickly the intellect of the British peerage is developed under the fostering care of a Newport belle."

Mrs. Lorrimer looked the picture of grave self-complacency. "Yes," she said, with a plaintive air, as of one who referred to an event which was tragical in its nature, yet not quite ignoble, "there was Amanda Hopps that I went to school with; a long girl, with red hair. Her father kept a dry goods store in Chicago; and she married—well, I can't just remember his name at this moment; but he was a real lord. Let me see, now; what *was* his name? If he wasn't a Duke he was a Duke's son—Lord Sir William—something or other. Didn't you know him, my dear?"

"I'm afraid I didn't. At all events I can't supply his name. It's a pity, Mrs. Lorrimer, that you have such a hatred for our English lords. If you felt more kindly toward them I should be glad to tell you something about their titles, so that when you go into society in London next year, as you say you mean to do, you will avoid making mistakes. You know we are a rude people, and we are apt to laugh at the blunders of strangers, although our own blunders are very much worse.

"Now, that's what I call real kind of you, Miss Fane. Oh! do you know, I was awfully vexed last spring in Vienna. We met an Englishman—quite a gentleman he was"—Mrs. Lorrimer remarked, in emphatic parenthesis, as though to call attention to an unwonted occurrence—"and I saw I made him laugh when I talked about your lords. I got real mad at him one day, when he began to chaff me about American politicians. So I said to him, 'Well, Mr. Mansfield, we'll pay you off for old scores by starting a society for the abolition of lords in England, and I guess Mrs. Beecher Stowe, that you English people talk so much about, will just take the presidency. It will be quite in her line, you know; for it will be another abolition-of-slavery movement.'"

"Mr. Mansfield," said Gladys, quickly. "Do you know anything about him?"

"Know anything about him, my dear? I should rather think I did. Why, we boarded three weeks in the same house with him at Vienna, and Mr. Lorrimer had a letter from him only yesterday. He's coming to Paris soon; so you'll be certain to see him. A real good man, I call him."

Then Gladys, who had been just a little startled by the mention of this particular name, recovered her equanimity, and having put certain questions to her friend which established the identity of the Mansfield of Vienna with the quondam candidate for Fanesford, she regaled Mrs. Lorrimer with a highly coloured account of the contest, in which, with irreverent tongue, she succeeded in placing each one of the actors, from her father down to the defeated Radical, in a ludicrous position.

"But do you know," she said, in conclusion, "I have always felt that I behaved badly to Mr. Mansfield when he was at Fanesford, especially since I learned how well he acted in the affair of the placard I told you of."

"Mr. Mansfield will always behave well, Miss Fane. I think him perfect; leastways he would be," replied Mrs. Lorrimer, with the utmost simplicity, "if he was only one of your English lords. I'm sure he looks like one."

"Good gracious ! an English lord, Mrs. Lorrimer. Ah ! I ~~see~~ that though you are so much afraid of them as an institution ~~you~~ really like them, after all, especially since they have taken ~~to~~ marrying American girls."

They were returning from the big shop at the Louvre whilst this conversation was passing ; and now they had reached the ~~end~~ of the Rue de Rivoli, and were crossing the corner of the Place de la Concorde toward the Champs Elysées. Neither ~~of~~ them observed that one of the reckless Jehus of Paris was bearing down upon them at full speed with that delightful ~~dis-~~regard of the lives and limbs of foot-passengers which since the fall of the Second Empire has distinguished the cabmen of the city. A warning cry from the pavement gave them the first intimation of their danger. They could still have escaped, by ~~a~~ great effort. Gladys saw in an instant that a single jump, such as an English girl accustomed to country life would think ~~nothing~~ of, would save her ; but her unfortunate companion, who had never engaged in more severe physical exercise than that of "the German," was utterly helpless. She shrieked ~~aloud~~ ; whilst the ruffian on the box of the carriage bore down upon them like a thunderbolt. It was only for a second that ~~Gladys~~ saw both their danger and the helplessness of Mrs. Lorrimer ; but the flash of consciousness which passed through her mind made her turn sick at heart.

Happily she did not lose her nerve. Seizing her companion's arm, she tried vainly to drag her out of the track of the carriage, which was now almost upon them. Suddenly a tall figure rushed toward them with a velocity which seemed to suggest that it had been shot from a cannon, and both women found themselves thrown down upon the ground, just out of reach of the wheels of the vehicle, whilst their deliverer stumbled and fell prone between them.

It was not in any way a pleasant experience. There was nothing heroic in the mode in which they had been delivered from their imminent danger. Gladys, as she picked herself up as quickly as possible, could not help reflecting upon the fact

that it was not in this fashion that the heroes of romance performed those feats of strength and courage which endeared them to the heroines. Such gentlemen, she remembered, with one of those quick flashes of wit by which her sense of the ludicrous was so often stirred, sprang toward the damsel in distress with the graceful agility of a Greek athlete, "seized them in their arms," and bearing them to a place of safety, released them there from an embrace, tender, yet respectful, without having allowed so much as a hair of their head to be ruffled. This was rather different from the way in which she and Mrs. Lorrimer had been saved just now by the sudden rush of a man from the pavement, who threw himself upon them with much more of vigour than of grace, and by the sheer momentum of his flying body bore them beyond the reach of danger.

Nevertheless, as she jumped to her feet again, she acknowledged to herself that she owed no small debt to her deliverer, and she turned to express her gratitude to him. To her surprise she recognized the features of Prince Bessarion.

The Prince at the moment was raising Mrs. Lorrimer, who was white and trembling from the shock she had received. When he saw Gladys he seemed inclined for the moment to drop his burden. His handsome face was lighted up by unfeigned astonishment and pleasure.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle," he said, speaking French with an accent the perfection of which even Gladys envied, "I did not know what a happy fortune was in store for me just now. This poor lady is faint and ill; but she will recover directly."

The inevitable crowd had gathered round them, through which presently the equally inevitable *sergent de ville* was seen forcing his way. The driver who had been the cause of the accident had not waited to make himself acquainted with its consequences, and he was being freely anathematized by the excited and gesticulating mob.

Gladys, when she had satisfied herself that no serious harm had befallen her companion, felt inclined to laugh at the

ridiculous side of the affair. None of them had come unscathed out of the little adventure. Torn gloves, battered hats, soiled dresses, and one or two scratches, gave alike to Bessarion and the ladies a somewhat disreputable appearance.

Of this fact the Prince seemed to be profoundly conscious.

"I apologize for my appearance, Miss Fane," he said, with a graceful bow.

Gladys returned the salutation with a low curtsy, and a smile of unconcealed merriment.

"Pray, Prince, have pity upon us," she cried. "Do not speak of appearances," and she cast a glance of mock horror at her own hands and dress.

"How happy I am to have been the means of saving Miss Fane," continued Bessarion, with open and unaffected exultation in his tones.

"Thank you, very much indeed," returned Gladys, with greater reserve. "It is certainly most fortunate you were there, and we are very much indebted to you. And now, perhaps, you will get a carriage for us, as Mrs. Lorrimer has had rather more than enough of excitement."

"But, mademoiselle, you will permit me to escort you to your home?" said the Prince. He spoke with almost pathetic eagerness, and fixing his dark brown eyes upon those of Gladys, looked more eloquence than he uttered.

"Thank you," returned the girl; "I cannot certainly forbid you to do that, though I am afraid it is adding to the inconvenience we have already caused you."

But Bessarion vowed that it would be the greatest pleasure of his life to be permitted to accompany them to the Avenue d'Eylau, and certainly his face bore out all that he said.

A very keen, clever, quick-witted man, with something of the nimble Attic intelligence in his brain, was Prince Bessarion. It was surprising even to Gladys, who was herself sufficiently quick of apprehension, to observe how rapidly he made himself, as it were, master of the situation. In that drive of less than ten minutes he had learned all about Mrs. Lorrimer, and

the relationship in which she stood to Gladys ; had ascertained that Gladys herself, though living under the same roof as Mrs. Lorrimer, was not, like that lady, one of the guests of the *pension*, but the occupant of an apartment on the fifth floor, and had even discovered the name of her chaperone.

When they reached the house in the Avenue d'Eylau, he made no attempt to intrude beyond the *porte-cochère* ; but having transferred Mrs. Lorrimer to the tender care of the *concierger* and his wife, bowed profoundly to Gladys, and turned to leave.

The girl was still struck by the ludicrous side of the scene in the Place de la Concorde, but she could not allow a man to whom she was undoubtedly indebted for her delivery from a serious peril, to leave her in this cold fashion. She thanked him once more, and with warmth, for his action, and gave him her hand.

Bessarion, with a look of triumph on his grave face, kissed the beautiful ungloved hand, and murmuring, " I shall do myself the honour to inquire after the health of mademoiselle," turned away with proud, firm step.

Gladys, as she watched him go, could not but admire the tall and finely moulded figure, the firm yet elastic step. Even to one accustomed to the fine physical development of the men of the English upper classes, there was something striking in the appearance of Prince Bessarion.

When the Prince called at the Avenue d'Eylau the next afternoon, he was admitted at once to the little *salon* on the fifth floor. His first glance round the tiny apartment showed him that Gladys was not one of its two occupants, and for a moment his face fell. But with adroit ease he recovered his smiles, as Mrs. Lorrimer, who was spending the afternoon with Mrs. Carmichael, half rose from the couch on which she had been reclining, and welcomed him with effusion.

" My gracious ! Prince," said the worthy lady, who was still pale and evidently suffering from the effects of the shock she had sustained on the previous day, " how can I ever thank you enough for what you did for us yesterday ? "

The Prince kissed her hand with nearly as much tenderness and grace as he had displayed in his parting scene with Gladys in the *porte-cochère*.

Then he was introduced to Mrs. Carmichael, who thanked him warmly on behalf of Gladys, and expressed her regret that our heroine herself was not at home.

"*Ma foi !* madame," responded Bessarion, "it is only your young English ladies who can go out for a promenade after such a catastrophe as that of yesterday. I did not know, dear madam," he continued, turning to the pale beauty on the couch, "of the happiness that was in store for me when I saw you and Miss Fane standing in the path of that beast of a coachman. I did not know that I was about to have the good fortune to rescue two ladies whom it is a privilege to know, and one of whom I had already encountered in the great world of London. But never shall I forget the horror that filled my soul as I saw you both, standing there, as if rooted to the spot; whilst the detestable carriage seemed to be on the point of annihilating you."

The Prince spoke with fervid eloquence, and "suited the action to the word." As he continued to dwell upon the perils through which she had passed, poor Mrs. Lorrimer grew paler still.

"Yes," she cried, "it was terrible indeed ! And you are our deliverer, Prince. Mr. Lorrimer will call upon you this evening to thank you on his own account ; for you know we quite forgot to ask you for your address yesterday."

The Prince bowed with profound gratitude. He was dimly conscious of the fact that Mrs. Carmichael was eyeing him somewhat narrowly ; and, like many another man, Bessarion had an objection to being watched too closely.

At that moment, to his great delight, Gladys herself entered the room. She greeted him with the frank good-nature characteristic of an English girl in the circumstances. It was quite certain that she had not yet, at least, succeeded in transforming herself into the image of a Frenchwoman.

Bessarion allowed himself rather more than the conventional limits of an afternoon call ; but, considering what had happened, no one felt inclined to condemn him for doing so. There was no mistaking his cleverness in conversation, nor his knowledge of the world and of society. He had, it is true, a trick of talking rather more about great personages than was quite in accordance with "good form." But as the names of English peers and foreign statesmen, nay, even of German "transparencies" and "serenities," fell trippingly from his tongue, Mrs. Lorrimer found herself in the seventh heaven of delight.

"Oh my ! Prince !" she cried at last, unable to contain herself any longer, "why I was only talking yesterday afternoon to Miss Fane about lords, and wondering what they were like, and whether they talked just the same as other men do ; and now just to think that you know such a heap of them, and that you are a lord yourself ! Of course, you are a lord, I suppose, Prince?"

"Ah, madame," he said, "my poor title does not put itself in comparison with that of the proud nobility of England, of whom the charming Miss Fane knows so much more than I can pretend to do. I am but a poor Continental noble ; yet my title is not one of which a man ought to feel ashamed. My grandfather, too, I can never forget, was a reigning prince."

Mrs. Lorrimer almost screamed in the ecstasy of her excitement.

"What, are you a real royal prince ? My gracious, just to think of it !"

A shade of annoyance passed over the face of Gladys. She had become to some small extent accustomed to the language of the fair American ; but this was an exhibition for which she was hardly prepared. Indeed the turn of the conversation was one that was eminently distasteful to her. She had seen too much of society to care to revel in second-hand descriptions of people of rank, and she was vexed with herself, and with everybody else, at finding that their thoughts were engrossed by such a topic as this. It was, however, against Mrs. Lorrimer

that her anger was chiefly turned ; and it must be said that in this particular she was hardly fair to that lady. It was not the fault of Mrs. Lorrimer that Prince Bessarion had so skillfully strung together a list of names that would have stirred even the most callous of Republican breasts with a sense of reverence and admiration.

Whether the Prince had or had not any inkling of her state of mind Gladys could not tell. She only knew that, immediately after this, and before he had quite satisfied Mrs. Lorrimer's curiosity as to the precise nature of his claim to be ranked among the Royalties of Europe, he changed the subject of the talk.

It was of Nice and the Riviera that he now spoke with all the enthusiasm of one of the children of the sunny south.

"And you go there in January, Miss Fane !" he exclaimed when he had learned by a chance observation that such was her intention. "What good fortune ! I, too, shall winter at Nice, so we may meet again, perhaps, under the palm trees of the Promenade des Anglais. Do you know it ?"

"No, I have never been at Nice," replied Gladys.

"Ah ! then you have still to make acquaintance with the fairest spot in the wide universe. Think of a broad walk shaded on one side by the palms of the south, and washed on the other by the blue waters of the Mediterranean."

"Oh, yes," cried Mrs. Lorrimer, "and they tell me that they dress as well at Nice as they do in Paris, and that the balls there in the season are quite too lovely."

"And madame will also be at Nice, I trust," said the Prince, turning to her with a quick smile. "That will, indeed, be happiness. I am a member of the Cercle de la Méditerranée, where the best *matinées* are given. I shall hope to do myself the honour of procuring for the ladies all the necessary invitations to enable them to enjoy the season during their stay."

And then he made his exit from the room with all the grace of an accomplished actor quitting the stage.

"My dear," cried Mrs. Lorrimer, with enthusiasm, after he had gone, "he is a perfect Prince Charming. If I were a young girl, I should fall head over ears in love with him at once."

But Gladys made no response.





CHAPTER XX.

A LIMB OF THE LAW.



THE grey English sky was heavy with clouds, and the landscape swathed in wreaths of mist. A stiff breeze was tearing the smoke of Folkestone in quick, black gusts from the chimneys, and compelling the people who happened to be out of doors to jam their hats tightly down upon their heads in order to keep them there. It was an ugly day, even for November ; and the little company of travellers by the tidal train looked about them ruefully as they crossed the damp quay, and, laden with packages and rugs, scrambled down the slippery gangway to the deck of the vessel in which they were about to face the ordeal of a rough passage across the Channel.

The majority of the travellers had evidently made up their minds to the inevitable. They made no show of resistance to their anticipated fate. Those who had secured private cabins retired to obscurity, though not, alas ! to peace ; whilst the commoner folk stretched themselves on the hard cushions in the saloon, or sat in every possible attitude of despondency on camp-stools, dexterously pitched in comparatively sheltered

corners of the deck. There was the inevitable old lady, whom one always meets on the route between Folkestone and Boulogne, and who maintains—in the intervals of her agony—a fire of questions against the luckless sailors. “Are we going to have a rough crossing?” “Don’t you think the wind is falling?” “Oh, dear! we *must* be half way across by this time.” “Oh, sailor, tell me is there any danger?” &c., &c. There was the usual bride, the hue of whose cheeks was yellow before ever the moorings had been cast loose; there were the crying children, the scolding nursemaids, the anxious, melancholy mammas, and the two fat and bilious Frenchmen, with whose groans and ejaculations the whole saloon was presently to ring.

Rex Mansfield surveyed the scene with a coolness which showed that for him at least the crossing had no terrors. Whilst most of the persons around him seemed to be labouring under the deepest dejection, there was a bright light on his face, and a sunny smile ready for any one who chanced to greet him. For this was one of the red-letter days in his life. He was leaving England! Alas! that such a statement should have to be made of our hero. But it was nevertheless true that his spirits always rose when the ghostly outline of Shakespeare’s Cliff or the smoke of Folkestone faded from his sight as he looked back from the bridge of a Channel steamer.

With black pipe in mouth, and comfortably clad in dark grey serge, he was not a man who could by any possibility be mistaken for a novice in the art of travel. Indeed, as he stood on the fore-part of the bridge as the wretched little craft gave her first leap and roll in the tumbling waves beyond the harbour mouth, he might easily have been accepted by the bulk of his fellow-travellers as a seafaring man. But before ten minutes had elapsed there was only one other passenger on the bridge to criticise him—a short, broad-set man, with clean-shaven face and blue observant eyes.

This gentleman had for some minutes been regarding the athletic, well-built frame of Rex with admiration, and had been

noting with approval his manifest disregard for the discomforts of the passage. Suddenly he jumped up from the camp-stool on which he had been dexterously balancing himself, and crossing the swaying deck, peered into the face of Rex.

"I thought it was you, Mr. Mansfield!" he shouted into the ear of our hero. "Don't you remember me, sir? Max Bielski?"

"Of course I remember you," responded Rex, shaking hands with the stranger. "But I've not seen you since we were together in that diamond robbery case. What have you been doing since then?"

"Oh, the old game, Mr. Mansfield; just the old game. Hunting 'em down, sir, hunting 'em down, all over the world. Lord bless you, sir, if you only knew some of the funny stories I could tell, you would think that we were all rogues together—detectives included. That was a pretty job, the diamond business, Mr. Mansfield, wasn't it? And you managed your part of it uncommonly well. I've had nothing as exciting since. But they tell me you have given up practising, sir; is that true?"

The person who had thus claimed Mansfield's acquaintance was a leading member of the Metropolitan Police Force. In spite of his foreign name he was thoroughly English in speech and manner, and his name was almost as familiar to the newspaper reader of the day as that of Mr. Gladstone or Lord Beaconsfield. A curious life it was that this mild-mannered, fair-haired person led. He was generally on the wing, searching some Continental capital for escaped English swindlers, or traversing the high seas in pursuit of defaulting bankrupts. Perhaps it was not unnatural that one who led such a life should take a somewhat cynical view of human nature. Rex had discovered this characteristic of the man at the time when he was engaged as junior counsel in the prosecution of a notorious gang of diamond thieves, whom Bielski had run to earth. There had been something about the detective, however, which had interested and attracted the young barrister not a little and he was glad to meet him again.

No sustained conversation was possible during the crossing. The wind had freshened to something like half a gale, and the steamer as it rolled and pitched, and tore its way through the swirling green seas, shipped volumes of water. Even Rex had presently to abandon his exposed place on the front of the bridge for one where he could keep himself tolerably dry. He and Bielski stood together, not attempting to make their voices heard amid the uproar of the elements, but enjoying that placid, voiceless companionship the pleasures of which are only known to the smoker.

Boulogne at last! The boat was an hour behind time; and a more dejected, miserable company of travellers than that which crept ashore by means of the greasy gangway and trooped into the big refreshment-room at the station, it would have been difficult to imagine. Mansfield found himself engaged in the task of assisting two unfortunate ladies, encumbered with parcels and wrappings innumerable, across the wet quay; and when he had seated them at one of the tables in the restaurant, he discovered that his services were still demanded in the capacity of interpreter.

"Lor bless you, sir," said the detective, when he at last found time to join the latter at the little round table at which he was comfortably consuming a half-chicken, washed down with copious draughts of rough red wine, "these women oughtn't to be allowed to travel. It's a positive shame the way they come sponging upon gentlemen for help. Why can't they get their own men folk to travel with 'em if they want to travel; and if they haven't got any, why can't they stay at home? Try some of this chicken, Mr. Mansfield; it is first-rate."

"And what makes you take such a hard view of the women, Bielski?" asked Rex.

The detective winked knowingly.

"I've more trouble with the women than the men, sir—a deal more. But it's not *that* I complain of. When I get a job in hand, the more trouble I have over it the better I like

So long as I win at last. But if you knew the mean ways of these women, sir, lor! you would be disgusted with 'em. 's not you gentlemen that get to know the truth about the Gies. It's us common people who have to do with 'em in business that find 'em out."

Rex was rather disgusted with Bielski. He had passed through his own experiences with women, and they had not been altogether happy ones; but his faith in woman's loyalty and tenderness and purity had never been destroyed.

"Come, Bielski," he said, somewhat sharply, "do not try to make me share your opinions about the women. There may be some bad ones among them; but there are others who have ever had their equals among the men."

"Quite true, sir; quite true. Why, it was only this last summer that I came across the pluckiest little girl I think I ever met in my life. A real lady, too, she was. And she'd run away from home because of a row with her stepmother. Well house in Wilton Gardens they lived in."

Mansfield thought instantly of Gladys. Like the rest of the world, he had heard of the girl's flight, and he guessed that alone among the people of London he had been an eye-witness of her leaving her father's door on that fatal July morning. He had never mentioned what he had seen, even to his most intimate friend, for he speedily learned that the whereabouts of Miss Fane had been discovered, and that consequently he could be of no service to her family. The disgraceful paragraph which had appeared in print regarding her had filled him with a sense of pain and bewilderment. It was impossible to associate such a story as was therein hinted at with the bright, proud, beautiful girl whom he had seen at Fanesford, and he resolutely sought to drive all recollection of it from his mind. But, alas! no amount of resolution will suffice to efface all traces of the presence of the corroding acid of foul suggestion. So it came to pass that although the name of Gladys Fane never crossed his lips, and though to the world at large he must have appeared an utter stranger to her, the figure of

the girl as it rose before his imagination was associated with a tragic story of pain and suffering which he vainly strove to believe was not also one of shame.

Mr. Bielski, quite unconscious of the train of thought which he had set moving in his companion's mind, cheerfully lit a cigarette, and then rising from the table, said, "You travel first-class, of course, sir. I've got a compartment reserved for myself, for all the people here know me; but then it is a second, so I suppose I must say 'Good afternoon.'"

But Rex declared with perfect truth that he would prefer a second-class compartment—even one of the stuffy second-class compartments of the Northern Railway—with the companionship of the detective, to any more luxurious carriage in which he would find himself among strangers. During the monotonous grind by rail between Boulogne and Paris, Bielski talked incessantly, as was his wont when he found himself in the company of men whose respectability was so far established as to make it unlikely that he would ever find himself employed against them in an official capacity.

Rex quickly learned from him that it was, as a matter of fact, Miss Fane whom he had been employed to discover when she left her father's house; and he heard, too, for the first time, the true story of her flight.

"Lor, sir," said the detective, "you weren't taken in by that story about the groom, surely. It was all a lie"—(Bielski emphasized the word with an oath)—"and if you asked me who invented it, I should say the girl's stepmother was the most likely woman in the world to have done so. I tell you, Mr. Mansfield, a man like me gets to know a lot about women that you gentlemen never even guess at. A mean, jealous woman, sir, even though she may be a born lady, will do tricks that the biggest scamp that ever wore a beard would be ashamed of. But this girl, sir! She was what I call a regular clipper: thorough-bred every inch of her. If you'd only seen her when she found out who I was, and what I was after!"

But it was not the courage and high spirit of Gladys, nor

even the alleged demerits of Lady Jane, that moved Rex most as he listened to the detective's story. It was the cruel nature of the wrong suffered by the girl through the heedless gossip of the press that filled his heart with passionate indignation. He was a journalist himself, and proud, justly proud, of his vocation. It was one, he knew, which gave those who followed it a more potent influence for good or evil than any other which lay within the reach of the great mass of educated men. The newspaper press of to-day, he had often thought within himself, is not merely what Carlyle called it in the past generation, the new Church ; it is the new Parliament wherein the great problems that trouble a nation's life are threshed out more thoroughly than they can ever be upon the floor of the House of Commons ; and it is the final Court of Appeal, in which the judgment of public opinion is pronounced upon every question, great or small, that engages the attention of the world. He himself was a mere subaltern in the great army of journalists. He had never wielded the editorial power. But he felt, as strongly as the most prominent of the great writers and editors of his day could do, the weight of that burden of responsibility that rests upon those to whom is committed, in even the humblest degree, the control of this mightiest of modern forces. Often as he sat, pen in hand, engaged in treating, with his large knowledge and masculine common sense, some of those questions of the day in which he was more immediately interested, there would rise up before his eyes a vision that for a moment almost paralyzed his mind, until it stimulated it to fresh vigour ;—a vision of the thousand homes into which these words of his were to go, as the voice of the unseen but not unheard teacher and guide, of the innumerable varieties of men and women upon whom he was to make some impression, however slight, and over whom of necessity he must exercise some influence, be it little or great, for good or for evil. Feeling thus deeply all that was involved in the work of the journalist, he had often been saddened and sickened by the shallowness, the flippancy, the mocking insin-

cerity with which some among his colleagues—even some who in their private lives were worthy and honourable men—fulfilled their duties. He had denounced with unwonted heat in many a little gathering of writers for the press the notion that their anonymity could in the slightest degree relieve them from their individual responsibility for every word which they breathed through that mighty speaking-trumpet which may convert the faintest whisper into a cry which echoes round the world. What he thought of those who, in criminal recklessness, or hardly more criminal malice, made use of the press to strike foul blows at the fair names of women and at the private characters of men of station and influence, need not be said. A sickening sense of shame and impotent indignation took possession of his heart as he heard how Gladys had been wronged.

Filled with anger, he felt as though he would have liked forthwith to proclaim himself her champion, and to have avenged her upon those by whom she had been so cruelly ill-treated. But as his momentary passion passed and his usual coolness returned, he could almost have smiled at his own Quixotry. "Who was this girl," he said within himself, "that he should thus take her troubles to heart? He had never spoken to her in his life; he had scarcely seen her. And was it possible that it was he, the mature, cynical, calculating Rex Mansfield, who positively thought of encountering all the forces of the most unscrupulous and most powerful section of the modern press, in defence of this stranger?"

Nevertheless, his anger burned within him; and Gladys Fane now stood shrined in his imagination as the victim not merely of a tyrannical stepmother, but of the abuse of that great power with which he was himself, in however humble a capacity, identified.

As the train drew near Paris, the detective waxed confidential; though even when talking to a man whose "respectability" was above suspicion, he did not forget to be discreet.

"Do you stay long in Paris, Mr. Mansfield? I'm off again to-morrow for Vienna. Got a big business in hand this time—bigger even than the diamond affair."

"And may I ask what it is?"

Bielski smiled. "I never object to questions, sir; I've to ask too many of 'em myself. But I always take my own way as to whether I answer 'em or not. There's no harm in my telling *you*, Mr. Mansfield, a little bit of what I'm after. I suppose you have not heard of the great frauds in circular notes that have been committed lately? Not in your line to hear, very likely. But all the bankers in Europe are up in arms about it. Why, sir, they've been 'had' this year alone to the tune of more than sixty thousand pounds. We've got a clue to the gang at last, and I'm off to Vienna on the scent. The hardest part of the business is that we have to do this time not with regular professionals, nor even with poor adventurers, but with men who have money of their own at their back, and what's more than money, brains, and a good position in society. It's all dark to us at present; but we'll get hold of them in course of time, and mark my words, sir, when we do, you'll find that there are some downright nobbs, regular swells, amongst 'em."

"Then you are looking after 'swells' just now, Bielski, I suppose," said Rex, amused.

The detective smiled. "I've got a clue, sir; and it *is* to a regular swell. By the way, Mr. Mansfield, were you ever down the Danube? Do you know anything about Lower Hungary and Roumania?"

"I spent most of last winter in that part of the world," replied Rex.

"Ah, then you know Bucharest, I suppose? Queer place, that, sir. Why, they have princes there, as they call themselves, that would be glad to take the leavings off your plate after dinner."

"Oh, I know all about that, Bielski," said Mansfield. "The Roumanians are among the most nimble-witted people in the

world; and from what I know of them, I should not be at all surprised if you were merely taking Vienna now on your way to Bucharest. There are more unlikely places in the world that you might visit when you are in search of a rogue."

"Just so, sir; just so. It is quite possible you are right in your conjecture. I *may* find myself at Bucharest before I've finished with this job; but I shall have to go first to Vienna, and then the Lord knows where. In fact, I must go wherever I can find that my swell has been before me."

"And have you got a warrant for his arrest?" asked Rex.

"Oh dear no, Mr. Mansfield. Things are a long way off that yet. It's only a case of suspicion against him, and all that I shall be able to do for long enough yet will be to keep my eye upon him, and follow him wherever he goes."

"May I ask if he is an Englishman?" pursued our hero.

"Well, sir," responded the detective with a cheerful smile, "you can certainly ask; but I'm afraid that is a question I ought not to answer. He's been in England though, sir, whether he is an Englishman or not; and he has lived among tip-top swells too, I can tell you. I shouldn't wonder, indeed, if you had come across him yourself, Mr. Mansfield."

"That is not at all likely," said Rex, laughing. "If he had been merely an ordinary rogue, why, perhaps, a briefless barrister might have chanced to meet him. But if, as you say, he has been living among what you call 'tip-top swells,' that is wholly out of the question."

And now the train was running into the great station at Paris, whose cheerful lights smiled a welcome upon the tired travellers, and served for the moment to divert their thoughts from the dreary detention that awaited them whilst the formalities of the Custom House were being gone through. Rex had no further chances of talk with his entertaining companion, who was evidently well known to the officials at the Gare du Nord, and who disappeared in some mysterious fashion, long before the ordinary passengers had been allowed to claim their luggage.

The next day was fine after the storm—so fine that it was quite summer-like in the Champs Elysées, where the leaves still lingered on the trees. Mansfield, after breakfasting in his room in the Hôtel du Helder—which had not yet expanded into the costly glories of the “Lion d’Or”—strolled along the boulevards, enjoying the delightful change from foggy London, and recognizing once more with keen satisfaction the familiar places that were associated with his earliest experiences of foreign travel, and with many a happy time since then. He looked younger than he did when in England. It was as though in crossing the Channel he had slipped off some load of care or anxiety that had been weighing him down there. His face was bright and his step elastic. Even the usual pallor of his cheeks had been replaced by a tinge of healthy colour.

The noble front of the Madeleine when he reached it was draped in black and silver, and he knew that a funeral mass was being performed. The open space in front of the church was filled with carriages, and a hearse stood at the gates, laden with splendid wreaths of *immortelles* and violets. It was evidently the funeral of a rich man.

He ascended the steps, and entered the vast, dimly lighted building, the walls and columns of which were draped, like the portico, in black and silver. In front of the distant altar, on an elevated *catafalque*, was the coffin, surrounded by burning candles, and almost hidden under the flowers which loving hands had heaped upon it. Near to were the kneeling mourners; whilst at the end of the church by which he had entered were a few of those sad, mysterious poverty-stricken men and women, whose wan and withered faces are always to be met with inside the Paris churches, and who seem as though, conscious of their own contrast to the smiling, light-hearted majority of the children of Lutetia, they have taken refuge in these sacred buildings in order that they may not jar upon the general gaiety.

There were one or two well-dressed strangers, too, who, like

himself, had been brought here by curiosity, or to gratify some passing fancy.

The low murmur of the priest's voice ceased, and a burst of singing, strangely sweet and clear, came from the choristers, among whom were famous singers from the Opera hired for the occasion. Rex would have liked to moralize to himself over this spectacle of a rich man's burial, and to contrast all this pomp and show, of crape and silver, of flowers and priests and singers, with the quiet dead, unconscious of it all. But the charm of the music took possession of him. He understood the whole story as it was told, not in the words of the chant, but in the swelling notes of the organ and the clear voices of the singers. There was the cry of grief; the prolonged wail of despair; the darkness and the depression that overwhelm the spirit in those bitter days when the sharpest agony of bereavement has passed, and the soul turns to face the grey, hopeless hours of monotonous sorrow and endurance; and then came "the low beginnings of content," the first whispers of consolation, the sweet notes of peace, and finally the burst of triumphant song, that seemed to speak of an open heaven, and a white Throne, and the host of the redeemed from whose faces all tears had been wiped away for evermore.

Often as he had sat in the same church on similar occasions in the past, he had never been so deeply moved as he was now by this solemn funeral music. When the singers had ceased, and the chant of the priest alone was heard, he still sat trying to recall the echoes of that glorious melody. Slowly and with reluctant steps he came out of the church into the light of day; and it was in a strangely softened mood that he pursued his way to the Avenue d'Eylau, to answer in person a letter which he had received that morning from Mrs. Lorrimer.

Long afterwards he thought how strange it was that on the eve of his meeting with Gladys Fane, he had passed that solemn and touching half-hour in the great funeral chamber of the Madeleine.



CHAPTER XXL

THE WORLD IS SO SMALL.



RS. Lorrimer was a woman who had a great fondness for dramatic surprises. Life, in the opinion of this good lady, was certainly not worth living, unless one was occasionally to have the pleasure of seeing in everyday existence something in the nature of a *coup de théâtre*. Now the particular stage effect which she was anxious at this moment to bring about was an unexpected meeting between Gladys and Rex.

It was still something of a novelty to her to meet with English people, and her innocent soul was filled with delight at the thought that she was to be the means of causing two persons of that nationality who knew of each other, and who had even in a sort of fashion been brought into contact with each other in their own country, to become acquainted in a legitimate and formal manner. The fact that one of these persons was a young lady of the high social rank of Miss Fane, and the other a man of Mansfield's mark and undoubted power, added to her enjoyment as she contemplated the *dénouement* to which she was leading up. She even thought how very nice it would be

if she were to be the means of bringing about a love-affair between two of those reserved islanders, on whom your modern American looks with a certain air of patronizing condescension which is probably intended as repayment with interest of the wrongs of a century of social humiliation. But fortunately for all parties, she kept her thoughts to herself, only relieving her mind by hinting to good-tempered Mr. Lorrimer that she guessed he would see something surprising at the dinner to which she had invited Mr. Mansfield.

There was a cosy little dining-room intended for the use of private parties among the apartments of the *pension*, and it was here that the dinner in question was arranged. The manners and customs of a *pension* are very simple; and when Rex reached the Avenue d'Eylau, on the evening of the day following his visit to the Madeleine, he was shown at once into this pretty little room, where his hostess and her husband already awaited him.

Mrs. Lorrimer, dressed to perfection, was vivacity itself. It was a delight to her to meet her old friend; but still more delightful was the idea that she had arranged a dramatic little surprise for her own special benefit, and had thus converted even a hum-drum dining-room in the Avenue d'Eylau into a stage, on which part of the interminable drama of real life was to be represented.

"You didn't tell me yesterday, Mr. Mansfield, whether you had many friends in Paris," said she, when the first greetings had been interchanged.

"I'm in the happy position, Mrs. Lorrimer, of having friends in most parts of the world, and Paris is no exception to the rule."

"And do you often run up against them?" continued the lady, feeling all the while as though this was stage talk in which she was indulging, and she and Rex performers who were acting their parts under the eyes of a theatre full of people.

"The world, my dear Mrs. Lorrimer, is so very small, that one cannot avoid meeting with old friends at almost every turn

one takes. Have you never noticed how constantly strangers whom you meet accidentally in travelling turn out to be the friends of friends of your own? You and I have not yet made any discovery of that kind," said Rex, smiling, "although I know numbers of Americans. But I've no doubt we shall yet discover that we have common friends, after all."

What speech could have been more appropriate as an introduction to the *coup de théâtre* that Mrs. Lorrimer had prepared as the chief entertainment of the evening? It almost seemed to her that Rex had got some inkling of what was about to happen.

"Well," she replied, "I don't think I know any of your friends in America, Mr. Mansfield; and as for my English friends, there are so few of them, that it would be almost a miracle if you should happen to know anything about them."

"But it is the miraculous that is always happening," said Rex. "I should be more surprised if I don't know any of your friends, than if I find that they happen to be among my own oldest and most intimate acquaintances."

"Anyhow, Mr. Mansfield, you'll have a chance to-night of discovering old friends of yours among acquaintances of mine, for I have asked two English ladies who live upstairs to dine with us. And here they are," she added, as the door was thrown open.

Now, the world is really so very small, and the travelled man has had so many opportunities of ascertaining the fact, that when Mrs. Carmichael made her appearance Rex was not in the least surprised to recognize in her a lady whom he had known slightly, as the wife of a man with whom he had once been intimate. Jack Carmichael, before he took to the Church and a decline, had, in fact, been one of his chosen friends at the University. Mrs. Carmichael he had only met once. It was when her husband, not far from the close of his life, was performing the duties of English chaplain at a small Italian health-resort. He had never seen her since his friend's death.

He smiled significantly at Mrs. Lorrimer as that lady went

forward to greet her guests, as though to intimate to her that after all the miraculous had happened. But before she had time to realize the fact that her "stage effect" promised to be even more effective than she had anticipated, it was the turn of Rex to show surprise. For in the tall, stately girl, with proud bearing, and bright face, lit up by the beautiful dark eyes, who followed Mrs Carmichael, he recognized—Gladys Fane.

Not one to be easily thrown off his balance, it must be confessed that for once Mansfield was thoroughly startled. This lovely woman, to whom he now found himself being introduced in the most matter-of-fact fashion, seemed to him to have been identified in a certain sense with himself in a crisis of his own life, and again in a great crisis of hers. He had not forgotten the incident of his meeting with her during the election at Fanesford. The impression it made upon him at the moment had not, perhaps, been very great; but it had been deepened by what he had subsequently learned of her history. Still less could he have forgotten when he had last seen her, on that summer morning on which the door of her father's house had closed behind her for ever. Nor could he drive from his mind the remembrance of the passionate indignation which had filled his soul quite recently, as he heard of the cruel irreparable wrong which had been inflicted upon her by means of that great social power with which he was himself identified.

The suddenness of this meeting almost unnerved him. He was but half conscious of the look of surprise that presently passed into one of amused animation on the face of Gladys, as she found herself in his presence. He mastered the conflicting emotions within him with an effort. All the chivalry of his nature came to his aid. He saw, not the gay beauty whom he had observed in the pride of her youth at Fanesford, nor even the brilliant woman of the world, upon whom he had looked at Exminster House, but the girl over whose life Fate had cast a cruel shadow, and whose fortunes had been blighted, without sin on her part, by the evil tongue of scandal.

His face grew grave, almost austere, as he bowed low in

response to the gay smile, full of meaning and mischief, with which Gladys recognized her father's old antagonist.

Mrs. Lorrimer wondered why he should wear such a look when being introduced to Miss Fane. She mistook his evident emotion for displeasure, and for a moment repented of her little stage device. Luckily, however, the next instant, her thoughts were diverted from the problem by Mrs. Carmichael's recognition of her "dear Jack's old friend."

"Yes, Mrs. Lorrimer," said Mansfield, recovering his equanimity, "people may well say the world is small. I did not think, however, that I was to meet the wife"—he could not bring himself to use the word widow—"of one of my old college chums to-night."

"My gracious, Mr. Mansfield, but this *is* a surprise for all of us," cried the hostess, with her big eyes opened to their fullest extent. "But don't you know Miss Fane, too? You really ought to know her, just to make the thing complete."

Before he could answer, Gladys herself spoke.

"I don't suppose Mr. Mansfield has any knowledge of me," she said, "but this is not the first time we have met. Indeed, I think I may say we are old acquaintances. Do you recollect Brown's shop at Fanesford, Mr. Mansfield? I remember quite well seeing you there at the time of the election."

There was nothing tragic in the manner of Gladys. Whatever might be the secrets of her own heart, her outward demeanour at least was that of the bright and vivacious woman of the world. Mansfield, almost before he was aware, found himself drawn into a lively conversation with her.

"It was a good fight, you know," she said, after they had recalled a few of the leading incidents of the memorable contest. "There had never been a contest at Fanesford before, since I was born, and Bertha and I were quite excited by it. I am afraid," she added, with a sly demureness of speech and countenance, "some people behaved rather badly at that time. I know I did for one. If you only knew how I hated you, Mr. Mansfield, until I heard the true history of that placard which was put out against my father!"

"I don't think," said Rex, "that any bad feeling was left at the close of the battle, however. I remember how kindly Mr. Fane invited me to dine with him when it was all over."

"And you did not come? Ah, Mr. Mansfield, I'm afraid that showed a little bad feeling on your part. You should have had pity upon my sister and me. It would have been such fun to talk over the election with you."

"I'm inclined to think upon the whole, Miss Fane, that we can talk it over just as pleasantly here as we could have done at Fanesford."

"No," said Gladys, decisively. "English politics are quite out of place here. I've become a Frenchwoman myself since that time; and I look back with a little disgust upon the kind of things that interested me in those days. I have heard that you are a great traveller, Mr. Mansfield; don't you agree with me in thinking that people may enjoy themselves better out of their own country than in it?"

"Ah, that is a question that each of us must answer for himself."

"Well, answer for yourself, then. Is it not so?"

Rex was amused at the vivacious and pointed cross-examination to which he was being subjected. He was quite conscious, too, of the fascination of the girl's manner; and began to understand how it was that so many men had raved about her.

"If I must answer for myself," he responded, whilst he looked into the lovely eyes that were fixed with an arch glance upon his, "I am afraid I must confess to being so much of a Bohemian that I am most at home when not at home."

"Ah, I thought as much. Sensible people who have seen the world will all agree with me, I am sure. What is the rhyme about 'a crust of bread and liberty?' That is what wise people must prefer infinitely to the stiffness of the most luxurious life that is lived under the eyes of Mrs. Grundy."

"I should hardly have thought that you had much of the country-mouse character about you, Miss Fane. But you must remember that Mrs. Grundy does not confine herself to Bel-

gravia. Indeed, I have found that she is still more at home in some other parts of the world than she is there."

Rex sat next to Gladys at the little dinner table of the Lorrimers; and he would have been glad to limit his talk exclusively to his neighbour, so much was he attracted by her brightness and vivacity. The sombre thoughts that had possessed him when he was first introduced to her had all been chased away by her sunny smiles. But Mrs. Carmichael, to say nothing of his hostess, claimed a share of his attention, and soon the conversation became general.

It was a delightful evening, he thought; and it passed all too quickly. Before it ended, however, he had received a warm invitation from Mrs. Carmichael to her little *appartement* on the fifth floor. Any friend of "dear Jack's" was welcome to her, and she knew Mr. Mansfield to have been more than an ordinary friend of his.

Yes: it had been altogether a charming evening, one of those days the wanderer through the world does not often meet with, but which, when they come, affect him as with the sensation coveted by the Roman Emperor who besought the wise men around him to invent a new pleasure for his gratification. A night of fresh, free intercourse of this kind, in which one meets not merely with old friends, but with new acquaintances who are yet not altogether dissociated from one's past life; a night of happy, spontaneous talk, far away from the cares of home life, and the commonplace surroundings of one's ordinary lot, must be regarded as an oasis in the dreary wilderness through which the wayworn traveller passes between his cradle and his grave.

And yet—and yet? As Rex strolled slowly down the broad lamp-lit avenue of the Champs Elysées, after leaving the *pension*, there were some shadows cast athwart the brilliant retrospect of that pleasant evening. Gladys Fane was unmistakably fascinating and brilliant, as well as beautiful. So much he freely acknowledged to himself. But was this bright, vivacious woman of the world quite the ideal Gladys he had

pictured to himself when he merely knew her by repute? Was it possible that a woman of real depth of feeling and refinement of spirit would have been found in such a mood as he was under such circumstances?

These thoughts occupied his mind during the whole of the walk to his hotel; and when he fell asleep, it was without having solved the problem which troubled him, as to whether Gladys Fane was merely a shallow, clever, brilliant woman of fashion, whose own recklessness had brought her to her present position, or a proud and high-spirited girl, too simple and sincere of heart to understand all the danger of disregarding the edicts of Mrs. Grundy, who had assumed this air of gay indifference to mask her real sufferings from the eyes of a curious world.

He had arranged with Mr. Lorrimer to meet him the next day for one of those rounds of shopping which are as dear to the male American upon his travels as they are to his female belongings. When he awoke he felt sorry that he had made the engagement. All through the night he had been dreaming—a strange dream, in which many impossible experiences had happened to him. But there had been one prominent figure in these confused and unreal tableaux of the night, and that was the figure of Gladys. When daylight came, and he recovered the full possession of his senses, he was angry with himself at the thought that he should have been troubled in this way. He even tried to disparage in his own mind the girl's most evident attractions—her beauty, her wit, her proud and fearless bearing. He laughed at himself for having allowed the spell of her fascination to be cast over him, though it had only been for an hour, and he made the firm resolve that in any future meetings with her, he would be less unguarded than he had been when taken unawares the night before.

Knowing the free and easy habits of the Lorrimers, he was quite prepared when he met them at the appointed rendezvous to find that they were accompanied by Gladys; but it surprised him not a little to see that the fourth member of the party was

that Prince Bessarion to whom he had been introduced in the past summer at the Cycle Club.

It seemed as though a mutual antipathy animated Bessarion and Rex. The latter, at all events, showed hardly concealed disgust at the unexpected meeting; whilst even "Prince Charming" was less charming than usual, as he recalled his former meeting with our hero.

Gladys received Mansfield with evident pleasure, and by one of those adroit little manoeuvres in which women are adepts, gave him the opportunity of taking his place at her side. To her surprise, he showed himself blind to the proffered favour, and, joining Mrs. Lorrimer, left our heroine to the companionship of the other gentlemen of the party.

The colour mounted to the face of Gladys, and a sharp pang shot through her heart. Little as she had been accustomed to this kind of treatment from the men who had surrounded her and flattered her in society, she would have regarded the incident with supreme indifference if it had happened a few months earlier. But now, with the recollection of the insult to which she had been subjected by the Arnotts still fresh within her, she could not accept so slight a rebuff as this with equanimity. The girl's heart grew hot within her, and her pride felt itself wounded to the quick.

She remembered, too, how pleasant the previous evening had been, how bright and manly and honest had been the talk of Mansfield; and she wondered within herself at the change that seemed to have come over him.

It flashed upon her that there might be some quarrel, of which she knew nothing, between him and Bessarion, and at the first opportunity she sounded the Prince on the subject. His answer proved that this suspicion, at least, was groundless.

"I know him not, mademoiselle. He was introduced to me by the gentleman to whom I am indebted for the honour of your acquaintance, Mr. Haviland. I heard, indeed, that he was somewhat melancholic, of a soured and hardened spirit; but beyond that I know nothing of him."

They were sauntering idly on the boulevards, Mrs. Lorrimer dividing her attentions pretty equally between the contents of the shop windows and the toilettes of the women whom they passed. Rex felt himself to be unmistakably victimized, and but for his good-nature would have sought an early opportunity of escaping from the party. Annoyed as he had been in his earliest waking hour by the recollection of the extent to which he had allowed himself to yield to the fascinations of Gladys, he found his annoyance increased now by the fact that she was in the company of Bessarion, a man of whom he knew absolutely nothing, but for whom he nevertheless entertained a profound aversion.

Suddenly, as they stopped opposite one of those huge plate-glass windows on the Boulevard des Italiens which cut off the envious passers-by on the pavement from stores of jewellery of fabulous value, he caught sight of the girl's face as it was reflected in the mirror-like sheet. Her eyes were fixed upon him, and there was something in their expression that moved him to the heart. It was no longer the laughing, careless face of yesterday that he saw. The veil had dropped for an instant from those lovely features, and he saw before him the image of a woman who had suffered, and who stood in sore need of succour.

It was but a momentary glimpse that he thus caught of the real Gladys. The next instant she had turned her head, and was laughing and chatting as brightly as ever with the Prince, who was assiduous in his attendance upon her. Yet what Rex saw touched some secret chord in his heart.

Lorrimer proposed that they should breakfast at the Grand Hotel, and accordingly they presently found themselves seated at a table in that huge caravansary, to which travellers from every quarter of the globe flock daily.

Bessarion, it appeared, was staying at the hotel, and he insisted upon doing the honours of the house for the whole party. Nevertheless it so happened that in seating themselves Rex secured the next place to Gladys, whilst the Prince was

seized upon by Mrs. Lorrimer, who evidently thought that it was her turn to enjoy his fascinating society.

Rex found Gladys in a mood which suited his own. She was pensive and subdued, answering him merely in monosyllables. But if her tongue was strangely mute, the language of her eyes was more than usually eloquent.

It had struck him that his marked coolness during their walk might have been misunderstood, and that she might have attributed it to his having accepted as true the popular theory as to her past history; and he was filled with something like remorse at the thought. The glamour of the previous evening no longer held him spellbound. He forgot the beauty and the charm of the girl beside him, and, just as in the first moment of his introduction to her, thought only of her wrongs and her sufferings.

He spoke to her in grave and kindly tones—such tones as a brother might have used to a sister in distress, or such as a father might employ to the daughter who had come to him for help.

Gladys seemed quite naturally to respond to his mood. No one who watched them, no one who listened to them, would have dreamt of associating their talk with any notion of coquetry on either side. For all-sufficient reasons of his own, Rex himself looked upon our heroine as a woman who was and could be of no closer personal interest to him than Mrs. Lorrimer herself, and he addressed her with a sincerity and plainness of speech to which the spoiled beauty had been but little accustomed during her career in society.

She listened to him attentively, almost eagerly. All the resentment which had fired her soul when he neglected her in the morning had passed away. Not for a moment did she think of him as a possible lover. She only felt that he spoke to her as too few among her friends had cared to speak; that there was goodness as well as wisdom in his words, and truth and a manly gentleness in the very accents of his voice.



CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH THE STORY STANDS STILL.



EARLY a month had passed since the meeting of Gladys and Rex, and to the former it seemed that, somehow or other, life was beginning to wear a different aspect from that which it had ever worn before. Mansfield was now a regular visitor at the Avenue d'Eylau. He came occasionally for the purpose of calling on Mrs. Carmichael; but more frequently it was as a visitor to the Lorrimers that he made his appearance. What ever might be the ostensible purpose of his visit, however, it seldom ended without a meeting between Gladys and himself.

She was not in love with him. She assured herself of this fact a hundred times a day. He was too grave, too severe in his judgments, not upon men and women, but upon the manners and customs of society, the innocent little frauds which pass current on every hand like a debased coinage which everybody accepts as being something which all know that it is not; above all, he was too uniformly cold in his manner toward herself.

It was this last fact which weighed with her most strongly

10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100

when, in her confidences with her own heart, she repeated her declaration that she was not in love with him ; and yet it was precisely this special characteristic of his which caused her to think so much about him.

No man, so far as she could remember, had ever treated her in this fashion before. From her childhood she had been accustomed to homage, and ever since she had reached the age when the "fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love," she had been conscious of the fact that a glance of her eyes, a smile, or a word, had sufficed to fire the hearts even of those who were ordinarily unmoved by the blandishments of women. But upon Rex she could make no impression, although she confessed to herself that she had tried to do so. It was not in any vain desire to achieve another conquest that she had laid herself out to please him. The conquests she had made already had come in her way unsought and unwished for. She thought of most of them now with a feeling that was almost one of shame ; and in her heart of hearts she condemned her own old flirtations with a severity that the most rigid censor of manners or of morals could not have exceeded.

But she could not bear the thought that this man, with his grave, kindly, brotherly face, his words, at once wise and humorous, his frank and pure spirit, should remain quite insensible to the charm of her manner, the fascination of her beauty and her wit. He puzzled her and provoked her more than any one else had ever done before. She might have thought that the cause of her failure lay in herself, and that it was because she had lost her own power of pleasing, that she failed to bring Mansfield to her feet. She could hardly take this view of the case, however, when she saw how, in the little *salon* of Mrs. Carmichael, she was just as much the reigning Queen as she had ever been at Fanesford or Wilton Gardens. The men she met were of a different class, it is true, from those she had known at home ; but her influence over them was just as potent as that which she had exercised in former days. From Prince Bessarion to the latest of the arrivals from New

York whom she met in her frequent visits to the *pension*, they were all her slaves.

All but Rex! He came in to spend an evening in the rooms of Mrs. Carmichael with the same air of cool restraint which had distinguished him ever since that first night, when for a moment he had given way to the spell of her fascination; and let Gladys try ever so much she never seemed to get nearer to him. Always good-natured, always respectful, almost, indeed, reverential in his bearing toward her, always ready to talk to her, to humour her, to help her in a thousand little ways, she found that he was even more of an enigma to her at the end of their first month's acquaintance than he had been at its beginning.

Mrs. Carmichael, who kept an affectionate eye upon Gladys, observed once or twice certain signs that seemed to indicate that her mind was in a state of perplexity, and she became anxious regarding her. Christmas was approaching, however, and the time of their journey to Nice was drawing near.

"Well, my dear," she said to the girl one day, "are you beginning to wish for a change? Paris is getting cold and dull; there was something very like a fog this morning. Don't you look forward to Nice with pleasure?"

"Oh, I shall like Nice very much," replied Gladys, "but I am still in love with Paris."

"And with the people?" said Mrs. Carmichael, quickly.

"Yes, with the people as well as with the place. I am beginning to understand the Bohemians. At first, you know, I was puzzled by some of their ways. It was strange to meet people who knew nothing of society, and who spoke with bated breath of men and women with whom one had been familiar from childhood."

"But gradually, I suppose, you began to find out that there are other things in life besides those which monopolize the thoughts of the people who live in Mayfair, and that a man or woman may never have been to Court, and yet be worth knowing."

"Precisely! Indeed," said the girl, her face brightening, and the tone of her voice growing deeper as she spoke, "I am beginning to learn that the things which occupy the minds of persons in society are mere trifles compared with those which seem to engage the attention of the clever people who live in what you call Bohemia."

"Take care, my dear!" said her friend. "You must not suppose that the Bohemians, even the best of them, are very much better, or very much wiser, or very much more noble and disinterested, than other people. All that I contend for is that those who have to live by using their brains are not necessarily more vulgar, or foolish, or selfish than those who have been born with silver spoons in their mouths."

"But surely, Mrs. Carmichael," said Gladys, "you will admit that Mr. Mansfield, for example, is not a man whom you would be likely to meet every day in society."

"Oh, I will give up Mr. Mansfield. I think him' slightly priggish, though, my dear. Don't you think him so yourself?"

"Priggish!" cried Gladys, with indignation. But she changed her tone almost instantaneously. "There are so many different kinds of prigs, Mrs. Carmichael. If you only knew how many of them I have met in former times! I prefer a clever prig, however, to one that is quite without brains. Don't you?"

"And Mr. Mansfield is clever, eh? Well, I shall not deny that," said the lady, with a shrewd smile. "And he is more than clever; he is very kind. Poor Jack used to tell me all about him years ago, I remember." She sighed softly over the memory of her husband. "But there is one thing in Mr. Mansfield," she added presently, "that makes him very unlike most of the men whom you have met with here."

"What is that?" asked Gladys, secretly conscious that she knew already to what her friend alluded.

"Only that he is evidently not a marrying man, my dear."

"I suppose you think that a man who travels so much

as he does would never settle down to domestic life. Well, I think you are right."

"Oh, dear, no! that is not my view at all. There is your friend Prince Bessarion"—Mrs. Carmichael laid a slight emphasis on the pronoun, which sufficiently indicated that her own relations with the Prince were not altogether those of unalloyed cordiality—"he seems to travel just as much as Mr. Mansfield; more, indeed, for he has been flying all over Europe during the last month, whilst the other has been stopping quietly in Paris; but I am very much mistaken if he would not be glad to marry, provided he got the chance."

"Possibly," said Gladys, with one of her old smiles of ingled satire and amusement.

"But Mr. Mansfield, on the other hand, does not give even the faintest indication of susceptibility of that kind. I fancy that even a certain young lady whom I know would find that her time had been wasted if she tried to make an impression upon him."

Gladys blushed. "I hope no young lady," she said, "will be foolish enough to make the attempt. There are men enough in the world who are willing to come at your call, to relieve you from any need to persecute those who are wise enough not to want you."

"Take care, my dear; take care," said Mrs. Carmichael. "Young ladies are too fond of imagining that it is their mission in life to reclaim the one sheep that has wandered from the fold. The ninety and nine who are safe within it are too tame to suit their tastes."

"Would you call Prince Bessarion tame?" said Gladys, with a mischievous air.

"Not in one sense of the word, certainly. Nor is there anything of the prig about him either. But you know he is no favourite of mine. By the bye, has he told you anything more about his family? You remember that he said he was the grandson of a reigning prince. Have you heard his grandfather's name?"

Gladys looked vexed. "No," she said, somewhat reluctantly. "I have not felt it to be any part of my business to question the Prince about his private concerns. To tell you the truth, I do not take so great an interest in them as perhaps I ought to do."

"But you like him, do you not?" her friend asked.

"Oh, I agree with Mrs. Lorrimer. I think him charming. But it does not follow that I take so deep an interest in him as to wish to know all about his grandfather."

"I may be wrong, my dear," said Mrs. Carmichael, in graver tones than she had yet used; "but I can't help thinking that you would do well to get to know something more about him before you encourage him to pay us those attentions which he has promised us when we go to Nice. Do you know that I am half afraid of him?"

"Nonsense!" cried Gladys, with spirit. "I think you may trust my judgment in the matter, Mrs. Carmichael; and I feel sure that he is a gentleman."

"But there are so many different kinds of gentlemen. Nobody would suppose that Prince Bessarion was a pickpocket, or a swindler, even if he were not so well supplied with friends as he is; but I hardly think he is the man I should like to marry."

"And pray, my dear," said Gladys, "who has put all this nonsense about men who won't marry, and men whom one ought not to be married to, into your head? Do you think that after my experience of life I am likely to throw my heart away?"

Gladys laughed over the notion, and her bright face wore an air of assured pride and self-confidence. Secretly, however, she felt that her heart was hardly so sure of itself as she would like it to be.

"Oh, you must forgive an old woman, my child, for taking all kinds of notions into her head. But don't suppose I am going to prevent your seeing either Mr. Mansfield or the Prince. Do you know that the former has promised to go south at the same time as ourselves."

"A pretty 'old woman' you are, indeed!" said the girl. "I wonder what Mrs. Wybrowe would think of my 'sheep-dog' if she heard that she was positively inviting wolves to enter the fold."

"Not a wolf, certainly, my dear. Mr. Mansfield may seem a little priggish with that grand air of his; but he is as honest as the light of day. And now get your hat and let us go for a walk."

It had become not uncommon for Gladys and Mrs. Carmichael to meet Rex in the course of their afternoon walks; for like themselves he was fond of strolling about the pleasant avenues near the Arc de Triomphe. On this occasion it chanced that they went down the Avenue de Neuilly. The day was bracing, and they were tempted to continue their walk beyond the point at which it usually terminated. They went past many a trim villa standing in its little garden, now looking bare and forlorn in the dull light of a December afternoon. Presently they came to one big house secluded from the road. It was a house which Mrs. Carmichael knew to be a famous private asylum, where lunatics of the worst type were attended with skill and care. As they passed the big wooden gates which afforded entrance to the walled gardens, a little side door opened, and to their surprise they saw Rex issuing from the establishment.

For a moment, but only for a moment, he looked disconcerted when he observed them. Then he came forward and joined them.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Carmichael, with a pleased air, "we have been fortunate in taking a longer walk than usual this afternoon. Now we shall have your society on our return."

"Do you often come so far as this?" he asked.

"Very seldom; but Miss Fane and I had been discussing an exciting subject after breakfast, and I think we both came to the conclusion that a long walk was needed to restore our mental equilibrium after the effort."

"An exciting subject! Pray, what was it?" asked Rex.

Gladys interposed quickly, "Mrs. Carmichael is anxious

On the subject of the grandfather of a friend of ours, Prince Bessarion."

Mansfield gave a keen glance at the speaker, as though trying to read her thoughts; but her beautiful face betrayed nothing to him.

"I am afraid I cannot assist you with any information regarding that illustrious gentleman," he said; "he must have been before my time. Indeed, I know very little about the present Bessarion. But what interest has his grandfather for you, Mrs. Carmichael?"

That lady explained that Bessarion had more than once intimated that he was the grandson of a ruling Prince.

"Ah! I see," said Rex, when he had heard the story. "You perhaps have never heard that all the Hospodars of Moldavia and Wallachia, who were rulers after a fashion, bore the title of Prince, and that it has been assumed by most of their descendants. I have no doubt that Bessarion's grandfather was a gentleman who once lorded it at Jassy or Bucharest, though I certainly understood him to say that his family came from Cracow."

"And don't you think, Mr. Mansfield, if it be so, that—that the Prince, in fact, was going rather too far when he tried to make us believe that he was the grandson of some royal person?"

"Oh, don't be unfair to the unfortunate man," cried Gladys. "Remember it is Mrs. Lorrimer who, with her sweet Republican simplicity, will insist upon making him out to be one of the royalties. He himself has never gone beyond the statement that his grandfather reigned, once upon a time, in some place which he has never mentioned to us. That, I presume, is strictly correct, is it not, Mr. Mansfield?"

"Strictly," said Rex, "supposing this grandfather to have been Hospodar of one of the Principalities."

"Yes; but the impression he gave us was of something very different from that," persisted Mrs. Carmichael. "Ask Mrs. Lorrimer if it is not so."

When the Avenue d'Eylau was reached, Rex found himself compelled to decline an invitation to afternoon tea—an English institution which Mrs. Carmichael took great pride in maintaining in Paris—on account of another engagement.

"My dear," said the worthy lady, when she and Gladys had climbed to their lofty perch on the fifth floor, "I declare I begin to think that there must be something mysterious about both these gentlemen. The one had a grandfather who was a ruling Prince, but whom nobody knows—just as if ruling Princes were as plentiful as blackberries—and we meet the other coming out of the most famous private asylum in Paris. What do you make of it?"

If her temper had not been to a certain extent subdued by her recent experiences, and if she had not been fully conscious of Mrs. Carmichael's genuine kindliness, it is probable that Gladys would have answered that lady's inquiry rather sharply. Indeed, she had to put some restraint upon herself just now. Mansfield's face and voice had not impressed her pleasantly during their walk home. He had talked chiefly to Mrs. Carmichael, and the little he had said to herself had been cold and commonplace in tone. Only once had those grey eyes of his looked directly into her own. That was when she had put a question to him, intended to draw forth a reply favourable to Bessarion. His look at that moment had been one which both puzzled and irritated her.

"My dear Mrs. Carmichael," she said, somewhat wearisomely, "I am tired of looking for mysteries in this life. Let us hope that there are none in the case of either of these gentlemen; but, whether that be so or not, so far as I am concerned, I shall make no attempt to meddle with their affairs."

Bessarion called at the Avenue d'Eylau that evening. He had been away from Paris for a week or more, and came back brimful of cheerfulness and gaiety, with a great store of anecdotes from Vienna. The Lorrimers had ascended to the fifth floor to spend the evening with their friends; and like everybody who came in contact with him, they were delighted with

the Prince's brilliant talk and finished politeness ; whilst Mrs. Lorrimer had her special cause of enjoyment in the profusion of distinguished names which fell trippingly from his tongue as he spoke of his week on the banks of the Danube.

"You know I am more German than French," said he, in the midst of a discourse upon the beauties of the Ringstrasse and the glories of the *cuisine* at Sacher's. "This Paris is all very well. It is beautiful, it is gay ; and your London, Miss Anne, is all very well also. It is rich and hospitable and comfortable. But in Vienna you get London and Paris mixed, the best of both ; the gaiety of the one, the hospitality of the other, and a grandeur—ah, *mon Dieu !*—a grandeur such as nowhere else on the dear earth is to be seen."

"Well," said Mr. Lorrimer, in his high-pitched voice, "I guess you are about right there, Prince. Give me the Hôtel Metropole at Vienna, with an occasional supper at Sacher's, and I think I can rub along ; leastways till I get back to New York and Delmonico's. But there ain't anything in Europe to touch Delmonico's, Prince."

The Prince bowed assentingly. "Some day," said he, "I hope I may have the privilege of visiting New York ; but just at present I am so entranced with the happy time I have spent this last week in Vienna, that I can think of no other place. It only wants one thing, mademoiselle, to be perfect," he continued, looking at Gladys.

"And pray what is that, Prince ?" said Gladys, with a mocking air of simplicity.

"Ah, mademoiselle, can you ask me ?" he responded, laying his hand upon his heart.

There is, or rather there was, opening off the little courtyard of the Hôtel du Helder, a miniature smoking-room, furnished with a Turkish divan. It was, at the best of times, a dreary little apartment, where the men who had dined well in the glass-enclosed, which in those days formed the hotel restaurant, sat and smoked in moody silence during the process of digestion. On this dull December evening, whilst all is light and warmth and

cheerfulness away up in Mrs. Carmichael's *appartement* in the Avenue d'Eylau, Rex thinks to himself that the tiny smoking-room looks more than ordinarily comfortless and desolate. For the last half hour he has been smoking in grim silence, manifestly chewing the cud of bitter reflection. Even his ordinary cheeriness has deserted him, and a French gentleman, who was enjoying his cigarette before starting for the neighbouring Vaudeville, has classified him in his own mind as a typical instance of the effects of "*le spleen*."

The little glass door, which serves also the purpose of a window, opens noisily, and Rex looks up with impatience to see who the intruder upon his solitude (for the Frenchman has now left him) may be.

A voice that he knows salutes him.

"Good evening, Mr. Mansfield. Hope you're quite well, sir. You see I've found you. Only got to Paris this morning from Vienna ; but it didn't take long to learn where you stopped."

The speaker was Bielski. The little man was rather more smartly dressed than when Rex saw him last. It struck our hero, indeed, that he was dressed for a part—that of an English middle-class tourist with money in his pocket.

"And have you come in search of me, Bielski?" he asked. "I hope you have not got a warrant for my arrest."

"No, sir, not quite that. But I want a little business talk with you. There's nobody here," he said, glancing suspiciously round the tiny *fumoir*, "but if you don't object, I'd like to say what I have to say in your own room."

Mansfield was surprised at the manner of the detective as well as at his request ; but he at once led the way to the little sitting-room he occupied on the second floor of the hotel.

"I've been after that business I told you of the other day when I came across with you, and a pretty business it is. You were right in one thing, sir. That was when you said I would go to Bucharest. I was there two weeks ago, and it is a mercy I am not there now. I was nearly killed by one of those blackguard fellows from Russia who drive all the carriages. You know all about 'em, however, sir."

"Yes, I know all about them; but what I don't know is why you have come to me on business. You don't mean to engage my services as counsel again, I suppose? Besides I think that even if you did I could hardly accept a retainer in so singular a fashion."

"No, sir; no—it hasn't come to that yet. I only wish I had them all safe at the Old Bailey. It will be a pretty job when we get them there, sir; as pretty as ever you saw." And the detective rubbed his hands in pleasant anticipation of the happy future which thus unfolded itself before his eyes.

"What I've come to you now about, Mr. Mansfield," he continued, "is to ask what you know of a gentleman who is in Paris just now, and who, I find, is a friend of yours. His name is Prince Bessarion."

"You don't mean to say that he is one of the 'swells' you told me you were looking after when I saw you last?" said Rex, full of astonishment at the unexpected question.

"I mustn't answer questions, Mr. Mansfield, on a matter of business. You must excuse me, sir; really you must. I ought to tell you that there is nothing proved yet. It is only a case of suspicion at the worst. All I can say is that there is something queer about this Prince Bessarion, and I want you to be good enough to tell me where you first met him, and who introduced him to you?"

"I can tell you that in a moment," said Rex. "I met him in London at the Cycle Club, and was introduced to him by Haviland."

"Oh, I see, sir. The Honourable John Haviland. A very gentleman *he* is, if you like. Mixes up with the seediest of foreigners I ever saw. Well, I'm much obliged to you,

Mansfield. You have brought me a step further in my inquiry, and now I won't keep you longer."

"But tell me, if you please, what your own idea of Prince Bessarion is. I must explain to you that I ask the question because the Prince happens to be in Paris just now——"

"I know that, sir. I came in with him this morning by the 'International' from Vienna," interjected Bielski.

"And he is on intimate terms with friends, particular friends, of mine. Ought they not to be warned against him, if he is really what you suppose?"

A look almost of consternation overshadowed the face of the detective.

"Lor, sir! you must not do anything of the kind," he said, with emphasis. "It would spoil the game altogether. Remember I told you that at the most it was only a case of suspicion; and it is just as likely as not that the man is as innocent as a baby."

Then Mr. Bielski accepted a cigar from Rex, and went on his way.





CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LAND OF THE LOTUS-EATERS.



VERY cheerful was the little company which assembled one lovely morning in January round a small table in the restaurant at the Marseilles Station. What did it matter that they had been travelling through the long hours of the night on the rough main line of the Paris, Lyons, and Marseilles Railway? Had they not by that swift flight through the darkness changed the bleak winter of the north for the sunshine and the flowers of the south? When Gladys,—who had shared a *coupé* with Mrs. Carmichael and Mrs. Lorrimer, Mr. Lorrimer and Rex being provided with places elsewhere,—opened her eyes in the morning she found that the dull, grey weather which even Paris knows in mid-winter had been left behind. The brilliant sunshine was beating down upon the white houses and towers of Avignon, upon the rushing, muddy Rhone, upon the gnarled olive trees, and the distant hills with their fantastic outlines.

She let down the window of the carriage, and inhaled the delicious morning air. It reminded her of the atmosphere of a June day in England; only, even in June, the English sky

was never quite so blue as that vault of measureless azure into the dim heights of which she gazed with giddy eye ; nor was the atmosphere of Northumberland as translucent as this of Provence.

The girl's heart was very light and joyous. Much as she had learned to like Paris, and sorry as she had been to leave it, she yet felt that this was a change for the better. It seemed to her that she was passing through the portals of Fairyland. It was surely impossible that the warmth, and the sunshine, and the summer-like aspect of everything could belong to the world of reality. Away in Northumberland at this moment the snows were covering the ground, the air was laden with misty vapours, and the sky dark with the leaden clouds. She shuddered as she thought of Fanesford and contrasted it with this glory of brightness and sunshine ; and then, with a happy heart, she closed the window again, and turned to look with a smiling face at her two companions, who were just awaking from their peaceful slumber.

She could not have told if she had been asked what it was that made her so glad. When she caught herself softly crooning an old north-country ballad she stopped surprised, and gave a little laugh of mingled wonder and good-humoured ridicule of herself.

"Surely I must be 'fey,'" she said to herself. "What has bewitched me, that I should begin to sing that song of all others ?

For he whom I wed,
Must be north-country bred,
And carry me back to the north countree."

With her quick perception of the ludicrous she instantly conjured up the figures of her north-country lovers, young Fenwick and Lostwithiel. The former merely darted into her memory for an instant, and passed away again into oblivion. The Earl's big person and broad, good-natured face was not to be disposed of so summarily. For a few moments she allowed herself to speculate as to his whereabouts and as to what he was doing.

"I wonder what he thinks about me now?" she thought. If he is wise, he must feel thankful that I refused to marry him."

There had been a slight shadow on her face whilst she was thus allowing her thoughts to dwell upon Lostwithiel. But the shadow passed as quickly as it had appeared, and the radiant brightness, which matched the glory of the day outside, came back again. What had happened? Nothing; but that the low, deep sound of the whistle was heard, and the girl knew at once that they were drawing near to Marseilles.

No sooner had the train stopped in the familiar low-roofed station than the door of the *coupé* was thrown open and Rex presented himself, with a greeting as cheerful as the morning. Upon him also that wonderful change from north to south had worked like magic.

It was marvellous too to see how both he and Gladys had succeeded in effacing the tell-tale marks which speak of a night of discomfort and fatigue in a railway carriage.

"Why, Miss Fane," he cried, as she stepped out upon the platform, "who would imagine that you had been boxed up in there all night? You look as fresh as the sunshine itself."

"Do I?" she said; "then it must be the effect of the transformation that the night has wrought. I feel as though I had acquired the gift of perpetual youth since we started from Paris; and you, why even you look not quite so old as you usually do. Pray tell me if you, too, feel the change?"

She regarded him with laughing eyes; but Rex, as he looked into her face, felt that beneath the mischievous sparkle of those dark orbs there was a gleam of something like tenderness which he had never seen there before. Gladys could not help it. She was conscious that she was looking at this cold, reserved man as she had never looked at any other. She knew now the secret of the joy which had filled her heart when she awoke and realized the fact that she was travelling into the land of the sun, and not alone.

"How good and kind and clever he looks," was the thought

that flashed through her mind on the instant ; and then she smiled again, and waited for him to speak. But before he did so, Mr. Lorrimer's tall figure appeared upon the scene.

"Where is Dolly, Miss Fane?" he said, eagerly. "What, not out of the carriage yet! Has she not slept well? Poor dear girl! I lay awake thinking of her half the night. I knew that confounded whistle would startle her every time it sounded." And the anxious man made haste to the assistance of his wife.

"I hope you admire the devotion of the American husband, Miss Fane," said Rex. "It seems to me that if Englishwomen only knew how well wives are treated across the Atlantic, they would never wish to marry their own countrymen."

"I am not so sure of that," she replied. "*Toujours perdrix*, you know. I should prefer a diet more piquant than one of perpetual butter and sugar, if I were to marry. No; I don't think, for my part, I should care to have an American as my husband."

There was a rest at Marseilles for forty minutes ; so that there was ample time both for the needful ablutions and for breakfast, to which the little party of travellers did ample justice.

"And what is your real opinion of the sunny south?" asked Rex, when—the whole party having been brought together in the same carriage—the journey was resumed. "Is it not quaint and curious in its scenery?"

"It is more than that," replied the girl. "Do you know I had a curious feeling, as I looked out this morning after we had passed Avignon, that I knew everything already. That, of course, is all nonsense, for I was never here before. Yet it seemed to me that I had seen it all in dreamland—the strange grey hills, and the bare fields, and the olive trees and the river, and the brilliant sunshine. I cannot tell you how strangely I was affected by it all. It was just, as I said in the station just now, like the renewal of my youth. Do not laugh at me, Mr. Mansfield, please, for being so enthusiastic."

"No," said Rex, looking with kindly eyes upon the girl's face. "I feel no temptation to laugh at you, for I have had a precisely similar experience myself."

"This morning, do you mean? In the train?" she asked.

"Ah, no. It is many a year ago, and yet the memory of it is as fresh with me as it ever was—the memory of that strange trance-like mood in which, coming for the first time into the midst of a new scene of surpassing beauty, one felt that after all there was nothing new in it, but that it all had been seen before—long, long before, in some previous stage of existence perhaps."

"Come, that sounds like something romantic," said the girl; "tell me all about it. Mrs. Lorrimer and Mrs. Carmichael are still sleepy, and I know that Mr. Lorrimer is dying to be allowed to smoke quietly by himself. Let me hear where it was that you had the same kind of feeling as that which troubled me this morning."

Their companions offered no obstacle to their enjoyment of an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête*. Mrs. Carmichael had already dropped off into a placid dose, whilst Mrs. Lorrimer was repaying the devotions of her husband in the other corner of the carriage by rolling a cigarette for him with her own delicate fingers; which task being completed, she laid her head upon his shoulder with conjugal trustfulness, and presently closed her eyes in sleep.

"It was, never mind how many years ago, Miss Fane," said Rex, feeling a little amused at the Othello-like position in which he now found himself. "I was a good deal younger than I am now, at all events. I had been sailing with a friend in his yacht for some months, yonder in the Mediterranean," and he waved his hand toward the glittering sheet of blue water now visible from the carriage window. "We had been knocking about together, enjoying ourselves mightily, and with very little thought either of yesterday or to-morrow; for we were both young, and I do not think that either of us had a care in the world."

There was no mistaking the tone of Mansfield's voice as he spoke of that halcyon time. "So you, too, have a story," thought Gladys to herself. "You know what it is to suffer." And she looked with softened eyes into his face, where, indeed, the footprints of the years of toil and pilgrimage were but too plainly to be seen.

"It had been a delightful time," Rex continued; "such a time as you only get once in a life, but now it was drawing to a close; for it had been arranged that my friend and I were to leave the yacht at Constantinople, and return home direct by the mail, in order that he might be in time for some engagement he had made in London. But there were still a few days of our holiday left. Well, one morning I awoke earlier than usual, and went on deck. Our boat was gliding along under a sky with which even this cannot compare, and over a sea the colour of which was a still more intense blue than that of the heavens. It was perfectly smooth, but there was a fringe of white breakers, sparkling like silver in the sun, where the surf broke on either shore; for we were running into a great bay or gulf, the entrance to which was guarded by splendid mountains, which sloped sheer down for thousands of feet, until they dipped into the sea. I have never seen anything to compare with it in beauty. Men talk of the Bay of Naples. I have seen the Bay of Naples at every season, and at every hour of the day; but to my mind there is nothing there which will bear comparison with this scene of which I speak. There were great forests, clothing the dark sides of the hills which closed in the gulf; and lower down, nearer to the sea, there were meadows as green as those of England, and amongs them, nestling under the shadow of splendid walnut trees, quaint and picturesque country houses. Everywhere one got new peeps of sylvan beauty. I knew that those shores which looked so fair were haunted by the most ruthless brigands in the world, and that if I had landed at the most inviting spot I passed, my life would not have been worth an hour's purchase. I knew that the women whom I observed through my glass,

looking out at our little yacht, would have looked on with absolute indifference whilst their husbands or brothers were butchering the whole of our crew. And yet the beauty of the place intoxicated me, so that I felt like the seamen in 'Westward, Ho !' when they had reached the tropical forest, or like the lotus-eaters who had come to the land where it is always afternoon. I could have cried out to my friend—'Oh, rest ye, brother mariner, we will not wander more.'"

Mansfield's deep voice would have made the most commonplace words impressive. Gladys found herself listening to this quiet tale much in the mood in which the fair Desdemona listened to the Moor, though here the hero had nothing to say of wondrous adventures and hairbreadth escapes.

"Yes," continued Rex, pursuing his narrative, "ever since I sailed up the waters of that wonderful gulf I have understood the legends, almost as old as the hills, which tell of enchanted valleys, and of mountains and rivers which have an unholy power over the mortals who draw near to them unwittingly. It seemed to me, as I gazed on all that glory of forest and meadow and flashing stream and snow-capped mountain, that here, whether I willed it or not, I had found my destined abode. There was not even a struggle in my mind against my fate. I was literally bewitched, I think; for I made up my mind there and then that I would remain here instead of going on with my friend to Constantinople. And presently, when we came in sight of a noble city, with white walls and clustered trees, and an old castle frowning down upon it from a hill beyond, I knew in an instant that it was to this place, and not to any other, that my face had been turned through all the devious wanderings of that long voyage. I felt as helpless in the matter as the needle is when it turns to the North Pole. Yes," he continued, speaking more softly, "I think I must have been magnetized. That is the only explanation people now-a-days would look at for a single instant; and that is the only excuse I can offer for myself."

He spoke so softly that Gladys could hardly catch his words

above the rattle of the train ; and she could tell, as she saw his eye vacantly wandering over the objects which they passed in their rapid flight, that his thoughts were far away from her and from the scene through which they were now passing. A pang of jealous pain shot through her heart.

Suddenly he turned, with a smile on his face. "I was forgetting," he said, speaking like one who had awoke from a dream, "what led me to indulge in this unusual rhapsody. All through the hours of that morning when we slowly glided along by the southern shore of that beautiful gulf, I was oppressed by the feeling that I had seen it all before. It was not merely the general outline of the scene, the shape of the mountains, the curve of the shore, that seemed to be familiar to me. If that had been all, I might have satisfied myself with the explanation that I had somewhere or other seen a picture in which these things were represented. But what happened was this:—that all through the morning there was not a yard of that shore, not a grassy dell, or a mountain gorge, or a house, or a stretch of meadow-like grass land, that did not appear to be as familiar to me as the home of my childhood. I felt sure that I had seen it all before—so sure, that to this day I cannot tell whether or not the strange sensation which took possession of me then was founded upon a real experience."

"Perhaps," said Gladys, "you had dreamt of some scene like this, and thus had come to believe that you had actually seen it."

"Yes, Miss Fane ; that is the accepted explanation of phenomena of this kind ; and I wish I could make it fit with my own experience, but I cannot. You see, I put the idea that had taken possession of my mind to a test that ought to have been a conclusive one, and still nothing happened to dispel the illusion."

"And what was the test?" asked Gladys, who was now deeply interested.

"It was this. When I saw the white towers of the city in the distance and recognized them, as I had recognized every-

ing else which I had seen during that morning of enchantment and wizardry, I allowed my imagination or my memory—heaven only knows which it was!—to rest steadily upon the lace. And as I looked at those far-away walls and roofs I distinctly saw rising up before me, like a vision of the night, the representation of a narrow street, winding and ill-paved, such as is common enough in the East. I saw the white-washed walls, and latticed windows of the houses, and even the very dogs that lay sleeping on the pavement, and the veiled women who were gliding to and fro. All this, of course, or something very like it, I had seen in other Eastern cities. But presently, in this strange waking dream, I found myself passing through a small gate, cut in a massive doorway, that barred the entrance to the courtyard of a large house. In the middle of the yard there was a fountain of quaint design—a great dog in bronze, vomiting forth a stream of water from his open jaws; and sitting near the basin of the fountain I saw two girls, one busy with some piece of needlework, the other lazily reclining on a cushion smoking a cigarette. The whole thing was as real and vivid to me for the moment as any scene I had ever beheld in the course of my life; and then it suddenly faded away, and I found that our vessel was still half a dozen miles from the city.”

“And what happened when you got there?” inquired Gladys.

He looked at her for a moment with a doubtful air. He seemed to the girl as though he were on the point of opening his heart to her upon some question which moved him deeply. Her own heart fluttered in her bosom, and her eyes fell before his steady, earnest gaze.

But all that he said was, “Ah, a great deal happened; far more than I have any right to trouble you with an account of.”

“But your dream—did that come true or not?”

“Oh, my dream,” he said, with a slight smile, in which she could discern a certain shade of bitterness. “Yes, my dream came true, every bit of it. So that is why I felt no inclination

to laugh at you just now, Miss Fane, when you told me what your feelings were when you awoke this morning."

She was panting to hear something more from him. That there was more to tell she was quite sure. Rex had interested her and moved her as she had never been moved or interested before by the talk of an acquaintance. She marvelled at herself; she even resented in her secret heart the fascination to which she seemed in some strange fashion to have succumbed.

But she could no more resist its force than Mansfield himself had been able to resist the spell which that enchanted land of which he had spoken had cast over him.

He showed no inclination to say more, though he must have seen how ready she was to listen. She regarded him almost timidly for a moment—a strange sensation for Gladys Fane to experience when speaking to a man! Then she put a single question to him, hoping that it might lead him to resume his story.

"And where was the enchanted gulf of which you have to report such strange things?"

"It was the gulf of Smyrna," he said, briefly, almost ungraciously. Then he added in more friendly accents, "Perhaps my eyes were 'holden so that I could not see, when I was there; but it has always seemed to me the most beautiful spot in the wide world."

"My goodness! what a talk you people have been having! It has been quite delightful to listen to Mr. Mansfield; but what on earth he has been prosing about all this time I haven't the least notion of. Ain't you sleepy, Miss Fane, after it all?"

It was Mrs. Lorrimer, of course, who uttered these words. She had raised her head from its resting-place on her husband's shoulder, and in a single instant had passed from a condition of vacuous somnolence to one of the intensest mental activity.

"My gracious! Miss Fane; but how well you look this morning," she cried, with enthusiasm; and Gladys blushed, she hardly knew why. "If 'Prince Charming' is at the station to meet us, my dear, he'll not be able to say you have lost your good looks since he went away."

"Prince Bessarion meet us!" said Gladys, with something like dismay. "Oh, I hope he won't think it necessary to do so."

And yet a few days before, among the pleasures to which she had looked forward during her stay at Nice, was that of seeing the brilliant and handsome Prince once again.

But the whole party were now wide awake, and the conversation became general. It would, indeed, have been a sin to sleep during that glorious run from Frejus to Nice. The line crept along by the side of the shore for the greater part of the way; and a hundred different bays wherein the blue sea was sparkling as it softly broke on the white sand, or washed against the dark grey rocks, were opened up to view. But the glory of sea and shore was not the only feature of that ride which impressed itself upon the minds of the travellers. How strange it seemed to see the lovely pale roses of Provence blooming in the little gardens at the stations, even in this the first week of January. To Mrs. Lorrimer the sight of the first orange tree, laden with its golden fruit, was as an epoch in her life; and to all of them it seemed as though they had indeed entered into an enchanted land, where winter was unknown, and the rose, the myrtle, and the vine enjoyed perpetual summer.

Presently they came upon the long curve of shore, at the eastern extremity of which lay the palm-enshrouded villas of Cannes; whilst the Isle of St. Margaret, with its white fortifications, was seen to the south. And then, ever by strides which opened up new scenes of loveliness, they drew near to Nice itself, with the snow-capped mountains shielding it from the bleak northern winds, and the cypress-clad rock on which its castle stands looking down upon its groves of oranges and avenues of palms.

To all save Rex the scene was altogether new. Gladys felt that there was something of witchery in this beautiful spot, with all its glories of land and water, its rugged coast-line, hoary mountains, and fertile, flower-scented plains. She looked to Mansfield for sympathy and encouragement in the mood which

had momentary possession of her ; and he did and said nothing to dispel the glamour in which she had chosen to invest herself. On the contrary, he responded instantly to all that she said, and did so in such a manner as to show that he was in fullest harmony with her mood

And so at last, as the light of the short afternoon, all too soon, was fading into darkness, they came to Nice ; and there upon the platform, watching with eager eyes for their appearance, they beheld the stately form of Prince Bessarion.



THE
L
of
A
all
in
no
of



CHAPTER XXIV.

A PALACE OF SIN.



NOBODY could have been kinder than Prince Bessarion was during the early days of their sojourn in Nice. The Prince seemed to know everybody, and to be able to do anything. Almost before the Lorrimers and Gladys and her chaperone had taken up their quarters in the Superb Hotel—quarters which Bessarion had secured for them before their arrival—cards for the famous *matinées* of the Cercle de la Méditerranée reached them; and the same attentive hand procured for Lorrimer the honour, such as it was, of temporary membership of that well-known club. They had not been there a week before there came big official invitations from the Préfet of the Alpes Maritimes to a great ball at the Préfecture, about which all Nice was talking.

It was very pleasant, this immediate introduction into the inner circle of Niçois society—such as it was. Mrs. Lorrimer was in the seventh heaven of delight, and could not refrain from chanting the praises of "Prince Charming" at all hours of the day. Even Mrs. Carmichael seemed to forget her

suspicious of the man who was so suave, so kind, so polished in manner, and who, it was evident, had no need of testimonials to character in Nice at all events. Gladys herself cared nothing about these dances and receptions; but the scene was new to her, and it was at least an amusement to contrast the dresses at the club-house and the Préfecture with those which would have been seen in a Belgravian ball-room. So she, too, had a good-natured smile for the Prince, when he paid one of his afternoon calls at the hotel, full of eager inquiries after the health of the ladies.

One great though secret disappointment, indeed, Gladys had met with on her arrival. When they left the station that afternoon she learned for the first time that Rex was not to be one of the party at the Superb. A smile, a bow at the door of the station, and then he disappeared from her sight into the depths of the omnibus of the Hotel de France. It was a disappointment to her, after the pleasure of that journey from Marseilles to the Riviera, and unreasonable though it might be to do so, she could not help resenting it.

But Mansfield seemed to be altogether unconscious of the fact that he had failed to come up to her expectations. He called, as a matter of course, on the day after the journey, to inquire for the ladies. They happened to be out at the time; and though Gladys did not leave the hotel on the following afternoon, in spite of the temptation offered by the glowing sunshine, no Mansfield made his appearance. She felt piqued and angry.

On the third morning, however, when she came down into the big entrance-hall of the hotel on her way to the breakfast-room, she found Mansfield sitting beside Lorrimer in one of the rocking-chairs which seemed to have been provided for the special benefit of American visitors to the Superb.

He sprang to his feet as she approached him, and came towards her with a frank smile of pleasure on his face. If the girl had been nurturing any resentment towards him, it passed from her heart instantly. The cloud was chased from her

lovely face, and she returned the pressure of the strong, manly hand which grasped hers in a friendly clasp.

"I suppose, Miss Fane, you think I have been very remiss in not seeing you before now, to hear from your own lips how you feel after that long journey; but you must forgive me. I was away up in the hills yesterday, enjoying a long solitary walk; and now I have come this morning to suggest something very terrible. I want you all to go to Monte Carlo with me this afternoon. What do you say? Are you afraid of visiting that den of iniquity, or do you think that I am not as safe an escort as you ought to have?"

"Oh, it will be too delightful!" cried Gladys. "I have heard so much and read so much about the place that I am dying to see it. But, of course, we must hear what Mrs. Lorrimer and Mrs. Carmichael have to say about it before we settle anything."

"I've asked Mr. Mansfield to stay for breakfast," said Mr. Lorrimer, "so that we may fix the thing now. I guess Mrs. Lorrimer is like you, Miss Fane; just dying to go."

"And shall we play?" said Gladys, turning to Mansfield, "or are we to be quite good and proper whilst we are there;—for we shall have to do exactly what our chaperon bids us."

"I'm afraid you will find your chaperon anything but what he ought to be, Miss Fane. If you like to put a louis on the tables I shall certainly not prevent your doing so; but my most earnest wish is that you may lose it at once."

"Then you don't play yourself: I thought as much."

"Ah, you imagined that I looked too sober to indulge in such diversions, I suppose. Have you never heard that looks are sometimes deceitful? That was a lesson taught me at my first school. I think after you have spent a day at Monte Carlo, you will come to the conclusion that a man may look very wise, and perhaps *be* very wise on most points, and yet not be unwilling occasionally to play the fool. But here come the other ladies."

The "players' train" from Nice to Monte Carlo leaves the

former town shortly after mid-day. It was with a curious sense of excitement tingling in all her nerves that Gladys found herself one of the throng on the crowded platform that morning. Like everybody else, she had read, from time to time, strange stories regarding the spot she was about to visit. She had seen it described as the vilest of all those vile scenes by which man has polluted and defaced the beauty and purity of nature; and she had heard it eagerly defended by quasi-moralists as a "necessary evil," a "providential safety valve" by which certain ugly passions of our common nature were to find relief, and thus prevent the risk of a nasty explosion elsewhere. But, above all, she had constantly heard of the place from the young men whom she had met in society as a kind of earthly paradise, where not only the climate and the scenery, but the music and the food and the wine, and the pleasures of every kind, could only be described as perfect—a spot where, if anywhere on the surface of the earth, the most eager hunter after enjoyment might have his longing more than satisfied. It was not possible for the girl to avoid a certain feeling of excitement now that she was about to visit such a spot.

Perhaps that which surprised her most as she stood beside her friends, waiting the arrival of the train, was the character of her fellow-passengers. She had expected to see faces branded with the mark of the gambler—as that mark has been made known to us by the brushes of a hundred skilful artists. She had looked for countenances on which the lust of gold was visibly depicted, or others on which the fatal stamp of despair was set.

Such faces there were in the throng: but they were few and far between. For the rest the company was strangely mixed. There were great numbers of coarse-featured, over-dressed betting men of every nationality; there were not a few shabby-looking Frenchmen, Germans, and Russians, who seemed as though they could ill afford to pay even the price of the first-class return ticket with which they were provided, but who to her amazement she learned were nearly all noblemen, some of

shabbiest of them being further credited with the possession of fabulous wealth. There were many women, from whose eyes Gladys turned instinctively, repelled by their bold stare, their hard and brazen aspect. But here and there she caught sight of girls whose features did not lose even by comparison with her own, and whose general manner and appearance was so tender and modest as though instead of being bound for the most notorious gambling hell in Europe, they had been taking part in some English village festival. It was sad to see them by whom these dove-eyed girls—some of them mere children in years—were accompanied.

But that which surprised Gladys most was the number of unmistakable English people of good social position who mingled with that motley crowd. Her own little party was not the only one composed of curious and startled new-comers to be seen on the station platform. It was obvious that many of their worthy fellow-countrymen, with their wives and daughters, had been attracted to the scene by curiosity. But then, unfortunately, there were other English ladies and gentlemen who were unmistakably familiar with this "players' train," and who appeared to be as much at home when they took their seats in it as though it had been the afternoon express from Victoria to Brighton.

The short journey—that wonderful journey in which long intervals of blank tunnel alternate with the brightest and most beautiful peeps of the blue sea, and of groves of oranges and olives—came quickly to an end. Gladys had barely time to gape at the imposing appearance of the solitary sentry on duty in the station at Monaco, the guardian and representative of the dignity of the illustrious Prince who rules over the rock and the shores of the adjoining bay, when the train drew up at Monte Carlo itself, and everybody alighted.

All the world, it need hardly be said, has visited the saloons erected by the late M. Blanc at Monte Carlo, and therefore to give any description of them here would be superfluous. It may be so; and yet for the benefit of those simple persons who

do not happen to belong to the world of travel and of fashion, something must be said of the scenes to which Gladys and her friends were now introduced under the auspices of Rex.

The little party, with Mansfield in close attendance upon our heroine, climbed the steep way which led from the station to the heights above. Everybody was going in the same direction. It was quite evident that at Monte Carlo there was only one attraction. Yet when the top of that winding path had been reached, Gladys and Mrs. Carmichael would fain have stopped. In front of them rose the garish and vulgar pile of the Casino—a huge building, which might have been set down appropriately on the banks of the Seine, but which looked painfully, outrageously, out of place here.

For it rose from the midst of a lovely garden, wherein all manner of beautiful shrubs and sweet flowers were now flourishing luxuriantly, albeit this was the month of January. And the garden itself, with its exquisite sward of English grass, its glory of scent and colour, was set in the midst of a scene so beautiful that to the eyes of Gladys it looked like the realization of an artist's dream of heaven. In the background there was a stern amphitheatre of precipitous mountains, at whose feet grew great forests of olives and chestnuts, though the peaks were white with virgin snow. So cold, so pure, so stern in their chaste and unapproachable seclusion, these mountains looked, so naturally was the eye carried up their steep river sides, and beyond their hoary heads into the depth of cloudless azure above, that they seemed as though meant to lift the minds of men from all base thoughts of self and earth, into the regions of unruffled peace and passionless repose.

Away from the flanks of these mountains toward the garden of the Casino there swept whole groves of fragrant orange trees, now laden with the ripe, rich fruit. And then came the beautiful gardens themselves, with their palm trees and their cactuses, their beds of roses and violets and carnations; their closely shaven lawns and piles of moss-grown rockwork, over which the little streams from the mountains fell noisily. Such a pro-

usion of the choicest plants and flowers, not of Europe merely, but of more southern climes, had never gladdened the eyes of Gladys before. The scene filled her with a sense of beauty and delight.

But then she turned, and with a cry of rapture, looked upon the great stretch of blue sea, shimmering in the brilliant sunshine ; and upon that matchless-coastline, fringed with a silver streak of broken water ; upon the steep rock close at hand, just across the little bay, on which stood the old Castle of Monaco with its quaint battlements, and weather-beaten houses ; and away in the other direction, on the fretted shore that stretched toward peaceful Mentone ; and beyond that upon the dim outline of the Italian coast, where Bordighera and San Remo could be just discerned nestling amid their palms and lemons.

It brought the tears into the girl's eyes as she took it all in. She turned with a little gasp of emotion to where Rex stood, his eyes fixed upon her.

"Surely," she said, with a tremulous voice, "there was never anything so beautiful as this before ? Even your enchanted gulf cannot have compared with it."

"No," he said, "to all the rest of the world this must be even fairer than my enchanted gulf. But when I saw that, part of the beauty and the witchery of the scene was supplied by myself. I was young then, you know—as young as you are now."

His tones subdued the emotion which for a moment had completely mastered her, and caused her to turn with impatience from the excited chatter of Mrs. Lorrimer.

"Young or old," she said, "I shall never see anything so beautiful as this again, as long as I live."

"I did not know that you had so keen an appreciation of natural beauty, Miss Fane," Rex remarked, presently. "Now that I am better acquainted with your tastes, I may perhaps be able to do something to add to your enjoyment during your stay here. I shall ask you some day to drive with me along

the mountains there by the Corniche road ;” and he pointed to the dim heights behind the little town.

“What !” cried Gladys ; “is there a road by which you can reach those mountains that I thought utterly inaccessible ? It seems like a profanation of their majestic calm to talk of driving to them in that commonplace way.”

Mansfield laughed. “Yes,” he said, “it may be a profanation ; but, unfortunately, all beautiful things in this world seem sooner or later to be profaned. It will be no profanation, however, for you to visit them ; and you may find that even this glorious scene can be surpassed in beauty.”

“Well, I declare, if Mr. Mansfield isn’t quoting poetry to Miss Fane in front of the gambling-place ! My dear, I didn’t know we had come to be romantic ; not but what it is a pretty place. Now, I call that stone-arbour perfectly lovely ! But ain’t it time we went into the Casino ?”

“By all means, Mrs. Lorrimer,” said Rex, “though you must not ask me to share your admiration of that hideous kiosk, which would be more in keeping with the style of Versailles or Mabilly than with its surroundings here.”

Gladys was not an unsophisticated girl. However true her instincts were, she had not gone through the experiences of three seasons in town without learning something of life. If it had not been for the command she had thus acquired over her own feelings, she would probably have turned back when the great swinging doors were thrown open in order to admit her to the vestibule of the Casino ; so intensely repugnant to her, so sickening in its contrast with the scene on which she had just been feasting her eyes, was the spectacle before her.

Behind her lay all that wealth of beauty, that glory of sea and sky and mountain ; and here lay——what ? Surely this was a veritable *inferno* into which she was now being ushered—an *inferno* of which the salient characteristics so far were bad tobacco and the Babel of a thousand voices speaking simultaneously in all the languages of Europe. Into the polluted

Smoke-reeking atmosphere she advanced almost timidly. Mansfield led the way across the vestibule into a noble hall, with marble pillars, and two fine paintings at the ends, reproducing with marvellous fidelity the views of the coast-line on which the girl had just been looking.

Her nervousness soon passed away when she saw that the men and women who were walking up and down this great hall were too much engaged with themselves and with each other to spare more than a passing glance for a stranger—even one who had the charm of so rare a beauty. Beautiful faces, alas! were not uncommon in that company. All the arrangements, too, seemed designed to reassure the timid, and to convince them that after all there was nothing so very terrible in the step they had taken when they crossed that fatal threshold. Their cloaks were taken by well-trained servants. The arrangements, Gladys thought to herself, were not inferior to those made for the comfort of the ladies at a Drawing-room at Buckingham Palace.

And then retracing their steps along the hall, they came to a door guarded by a gentleman of sleek demeanour supported by a lacquey in gorgeous livery. At a word from Rex, the servant opened the door, and they passed into the play-rooms beyond. The first thing that struck Gladys was the strange silence which prevailed in this noble suite of rooms, a silence broken only by the hoarse tones of the croupiers as they announced the winning numbers, and by the rattle of the gold and silver coins as they were raked in or paid out from the bank. No one spoke above a whisper. All the energies of the players seemed to be absorbed by the chances of the game, and even the mere spectators, who were wandering aimlessly from table to table, addressed each other in muffled tones. A dim light pervaded the rooms, very different from the glorious glow of sunshine outside. It surprised the girl, until she saw that green blinds shrouded all the windows.

"Yes," said Rex in low tones, answering her look of mute interrogation, "nobody here wishes to be reminded of the

scene outside ; besides the work that is going on here is better suited for the lamplight than for the sunshine."

He led the party to the inner room of the three comprising the suite, and they stationed themselves at one of the tables to watch the play. Then it was that Gladys recalled Mansfield's words about the deceitfulness of outward appearances. Though the majority of the players at the table which they had selected for observation were people who would have passed muster in any drawing-room in London. Indeed, before our heroine had been five minutes in the room she had recognized at least one man whose face had been familiar to her in society—a Peer. Fortunately, she thought, they had never been introduced, so she had no occasion to dread a meeting with him.

Most of the players were men who had the outward appearance of gentlemen ; and probably half of them were Englishmen. There were old men with grey hair and venerable faces that would have commanded respect if they had been seen anywhere else ; and there were young boys, so young that it was difficult to believe they had reached those "years of discretion" to which alone the doors of the Casino are supposed to be open. But besides the men there were several women seated at the table. Some of these were manifestly professional gamblers, or worse ; but among them were one or two elderly ladies, of staid and matronly appearance, whose rich dresses and costly jewellery merely confirmed the impression concerning their position in society which was conveyed by their faces and their manners. Most of them played very impassively. Mrs. Lorrimer, who had hoped to witness a "scene," was disappointed before she had stood there five minutes. Money was being staked in large amounts at this table, and was being won and lost freely. It was one of the two *troupe et quarante* tables, and happened to be that at which for the moment the highest play prevailed ; a fact which accounted for the large number of Englishmen and Englishwomen who were seated at it.

"I don't call this the least bit exciting," said Mrs. Lorrimer,

Presently. "It is as dull as a bank or a church. Is there nothing livelier to be seen, Mr. Mansfield?"

"Oh, yes," answered Rex. "If you like to come with me, I'll show you the *roulette* tables. There is always more excitement there, perhaps because the run of the play is so much lower."

Mrs. Lorrimer and Mrs. Carmichael accepted his invitation, and followed him into one of the other rooms. Gladys, who was intent upon watching the play of a young man who was staking heavily, remained where she was, under the care of Lorrimer.

The game had a strange fascination for her. The young man whom she was watching was unmistakably English: dressed in a light-coloured tourist suit, with hands richly adorned with rings after the manner of the gilded youth of our day. His face was not a bad one, though the devil's handiwork was legible enough upon those weak and vacuous features. He was losing quickly. The big pile of notes which were on the table in front of him when Gladys first came upon the scene had dwindled down until only one or two remained. He staked these on the red, and the next turn of the cards showed that he had lost. He turned, with a smile, to another young man, who was sitting next to him, and who, playing less heavily, had been more fortunate in his operations. Apparently his friend tried to dissuade him from continuing the game. The youth half rose from his seat, and already it had been claimed by one of the waiting crowd behind, when, looking across the table, he chanced to catch sight of Gladys. He saw that she was watching him; and hesitated ashamed at being seen by his beautiful countrywoman retiring beaten from the field. To the surprise of his companion, he resumed his seat, and thrusting his hand into the pocket of his coat, produced a still larger bundle of notes than that which he had originally laid upon the table. At the same moment he glanced across at Gladys, with a meaning look in his eyes, and pointing to his stake smiled slightly.

There was nothing absolutely impertinent in the action. It was frank and boyish rather than insolent. But the lad's intention was manifest: he wished Gladys to know that hers had been the influence which had caused him to remain and "face it out," as he would have said. The hot colour mounted in her cheeks. And yet she did not leave the table, as she felt she ought to have done; a feverish interest in the sequel of the game in which she had been thus unwillingly made an actor took possession of her, and she felt as though she could not tear herself from the spot.

The boy went on playing again much as he had done before, staking every time the maximum permitted by the rules of the bank. But now, as often happens in that fatal game, whereof no sane man has yet attempted to forecast the chances, there was a change of luck. Red, which the youth backed steadily, came up time after time, until it was evident that he had won more than the amount he had originally lost. More than once he tried to catch the eye of Gladys as he raked in a fresh heap of notes: but she steadily avoided looking at him.

"The friend of Mademoiselle must thank the benignant stars that sent her to his aid just now."

She turned, surprised and indignant, as these words, spoken in French, reached her ear. There was no mistaking the fact that they were intended for her.

The speaker was a dark, spare man, of sallow face, with shifty sinister eye, who had been standing near her watching the game. When Gladys turned to look at him he slightly touched his hat, and smiled unpleasantly; whilst his evil stare rested impudently upon her. With haughty disdain she took the arm of Lorrimer, and without even vouchsafing the fellow a second glance, left the room.

The whole incident annoyed her. To the Gladys of old it would have seemed delightful and romantic to have been the means of changing the fortunes of a luckless gambler. But this was not the light in which the Gladys of to-day regarded the incident; and she was vexed with herself for having

remained to watch the boy's play—only, as it turned out, to be insulted by the ill-favoured foreigner who had addressed her.

Fortunately, Lorrimer, intent upon watching the game, had observed nothing of the incident, and merely concluded that Gladys was tired of the scene.

Rejoining Rex and the other ladies, they found that these also were quite ready to leave the gaming-rooms, the atmosphere of which was close and oppressive. It was the hour for the usual afternoon concert, and accordingly they turned into the gorgeous theatre, where "the finest band in the world," if we are to believe the advertisements of M. Blanc's executors, was about to delight the ears of a thousand persons by its performances.

How strange it seemed to sit here, listening to the heaven-inspired strains of Beethoven, and Mozart, and Wagner, and Bach, strains which seemed to lift the soul out of all the sordid cares and struggles of earth, and to carry it into regions where all is pure and noble, and filled through and through with peace, whilst, separated from them only by the thickness of a single wall, that accursed game of gold was being played so eagerly! Gladys marvelled at the placid faces round her; marvelled most of all at the refined Englishwomen who sat here, programme in hand, as though this richly gilded room had been St. James's Hall on a Saturday afternoon.

"Come away out into the gardens again," said Rex, when the concert was at an end. "The air of heaven is better than the atmosphere of the Casino."

It had grown dusk; but a sickle moon was sending a trembling ray of silver across the placid sea; and the pure air that came down from the cold, dark mountains was delicious. Gladys had recovered from the annoyance of the incident in the gaming-room, and as she walked beside Rex on the terrace overlooking the Mediterranean a great contentment seemed to fill her heart. She had little to say to her companion. It was strange, indeed, how silent the bright Gladys of old days now

often was. But Mansfield talked, and talked well ; or so at least the girl thought.

They dined at the big hotel, sitting down at a strange *table d'hôte* among surely the most motley company of diners that could be gathered together in any corner of Europe. Even Lorrimer, who had seen something of the Western world in its wilder phases, confessed that he had never found himself in quite such mixed society as this ; but the bright, cheery talk of Mansfield, who had a hundred anecdotes to tell of scenes still more exciting, and dinners eaten in company still more remarkable, made the meal a lively one ; and they were all sorry when it was over.





CHAPTER XXV.

A MYSTERY.



WHEN they came out of the hotel after dinner, the evening, though rather cold as evenings on the Riviera are apt to be, even after the sunniest day, was still fine enough to tempt them to linger out of doors. So the two men lighted their cigars and walked with the ladies among the paths of the beautiful garden in the public square of Monte Carlo.

But by and by the restless soul of Mrs. Lorrimer would not permit of the continuance of this mild diversion.

"I guess," said she, "I'll go back to the rooms and see what that old lady is doing who won all those dollars at *roulette*. My! what a lovely bonnet she had on. I guess *she* was not an Englishwoman, Miss Fane! She was dressed in real Paris style."

"Why, I heard her speaking English to the gentleman with her," remarked Mrs. Carmichael.

"Well, then, I reckon she was an American. That wasn't an English bonnet she had on, nor an English gown either."

"Don't you give Englishwomen credit for being able to dress

decently, Mrs. Lorrimer?" asked Rex, who had been not a little amused in past days by the peculiar opinions of the fair American.

"Why, do you mean to say you can't see it for yourself, Mr. Mansfield—you that have travelled all over the world? Did you ever see an Englishwoman who could dress as well as a Frenchwoman or an American? I never did. Of course you'll tell me that there is Miss Fane, who can. But Miss Fane ain't an example. I don't call her an Englishwoman. Why, she walks like an American girl and looks like a Spaniard; so it isn't of any use throwing her in my face."

"Oh, if you are to make exceptions at your pleasure in that fashion, I am afraid that it will not be of much use trying to argue with you. All the same, I must still cling to the idea that I have seen Englishwomen who could dress well."

"I wish you'd send some of them to Paris, then," retorted Mrs. Lorrimer. "It's positively distressing to see what awful guys they make of themselves on the boulevards."

They had reached the great hall of the Casino once more. Gladys averred that she had no wish to return to the gaming-rooms, and that in her opinion it would be more interesting to take a seat here and watch the motley throng of men and women as, with restless steps, they paced to and fro, than to look on at the gambling. Thus it happened that whilst the Lorrimers went back to observe what was passing at the tables, Gladys and Mrs. Carmichael were left on a couch in the hall under the care of Rex.

They had taken up a position near the door of exit from the play-rooms. Nowhere in the world now-a-days is it possible to enjoy a more interesting dramatic scene in real life than that which is presented here. If such a scene were set upon the stage, every voice would applaud it as a triumph of dramatic art. The noble hall; the ever-moving throng, in which all nationalities, all ranks in life, all shades of vice and virtue are represented; the swinging-doors, the opening of which affords a glimpse into the brilliant play-rooms beyond, with the silent,

eager groups gathered round the tables—there are surely here all the materials which the exigencies of the stage demand.

Gladys could not help being struck by the resemblance of the scene to some triumph of the theatre. But all the while she knew that this was no brilliant stage-play on which she was looking. The men and women who at rapid intervals came through this door of exit were no hired actors, simulating the passions depicted on their faces. For them, at least, this stirring drama was intensely real. Whether it was that most of the players had now dined, or that they were of a different class in the evening from those who frequented the tables earlier in the day, Gladys could not determine. She saw, however, that there was a much freer display of emotion and passion now than there had been in the morning.

It was an easy matter to tell who among those who emerged from that fatal doorway had won and who had lost. Now and then, to be sure, a decorous, well-bred Englishman came out whose impassive countenance defied scrutiny. But the majority of the evening players were of a different class, and exultation, chagrin, despair were freely written on their faces as they left the rooms in which they had been tempting fortune. There was one middle-aged woman who was only able to totter as far as the couch on which Gladys and her friends were seated. She flung herself into one corner of it, whilst her frame was rent with the sobs which she vainly endeavoured to stifle. A young man, her son, who had followed her from the room, vainly sought to console her. In answer to his soothing words, she opened her empty bag and pointed to the vacancy within, whilst her cries broke out afresh. No one heeded her. Both men and women were all too completely absorbed in their own affairs to have so much as a glance to bestow upon the ruined gambler.

It was whilst this wretched creature was still in the depths of grief that the young Englishman whom Gladys had been watching came out of the room. His face was flushed with excitement, and he was attended by a small knot of comrades,

who had no sooner emerged from the silent gambling-rooms into the hall than they surrounded him and broke out in noisy and boisterous congratulations.

"You have done it at last, old boy! Didn't I tell you so?" was the burden of their cries. To Rex, who knew the ways of the place, it was apparent that the lad had broken the bank.

Suddenly the boy caught sight of Gladys on the couch. He made a step towards her, and took off his hat; but either her face or the consciousness that to speak to her would be an unwarrantable liberty restrained him; and contenting himself with bowing respectfully to her, he turned away with his noisy companions.

"Do you know the young hero who has broken the bank, Miss Fane?" asked Rex, who had seen what had happened.

Then Gladys told the story of the incident in the gaming-room. Mansfield laughed at the boy's conduct in resuming his play under the auspices of Gladys, and rallied her upon the demonstration thus given of the fact that she had not the evil eye. But when he heard the story of her encounter with the man who had presumed to speak to her at the table an angry light burned in his eyes, and he could not refrain from saying something strong, not merely about the man who had been guilty of the insult, but about Mr. Lorrimer, who had permitted it to pass unnoticed.

It was whilst he was still speaking of the affair that a slightly built, under-sized man with black hair and sallow face came out of the play-rooms. Gladys recognized him instantly as the very person whom Rex was denouncing.

His sinister eye was fixed at once upon her, and again the repellant smile showed itself on his lips. Suddenly, however, his face changed, and a look of blank astonishment spread over it. Then recovering himself he came forward, and placing his hand on Mansfield's shoulder said, "At last, my dear friend! Do we meet again?"

Rex sprang to his feet as if he had received an electric

shock. A momentary pallor had blanched his cheeks ; but it gave way almost immediately to an angry flush.

"*You* here, Calanis !" he said, in tones which were almost menacing, "I thought you were in ——"

The Greek, for such he was, shrugged his shoulders, and with the strange gesture of his race which to the initiated conveys an appeal for mercy, said, in whining tones—

"Ah, Monsieur Rex, I am there no longer, as you see. You would not wish it otherwise, my friend ? I have been here these three weeks now ; but I little thought of the pleasure that was in store for me."

"Excuse me, ladies, for one moment," said Rex, turning to Gladys and Mrs. Carmichael with a face the agitation of which he could not altogether control. "I shall not go out of sight, and you need not fear to be left ; but I must speak to this man." He spoke in English, whereas the Greek and he had conversed in French.

They crossed the hall together, and then Rex, suddenly facing the other, said, in his sternest accents—

"Now then, Calanis, tell me what you mean by your presence here."

"*Ma foi* ! I am here for my pleasure, my good Rex. Why not ? I perceive that even the immaculate Englishman has his pleasures also, and comes here to enjoy them. May not the poor Smyrniote do the same ?"

There was no mistaking the meaning of the sinister smile with which, as he uttered these words, Calanis glanced across at the bench on which Mrs. Carmichael and Gladys were still sitting.

Rex bit his lip to keep down the passionate words that were upon his tongue.

"Listen to me, Calanis !" he said. If Gladys had been near she would have marvelled to hear Mansfield addressing a human being in such tones. They were such as a reasonable man would hardly have used to a dog. "If you dare to say anything that I look upon as an insult to any of my friends, I

shall give you the choice of being flung into the Mediterranean there, or of being handed over to —— you know whom."

An uneasy look showed itself on the man's face for a moment, but it passed quickly, and a complacent smile appeared in its place.

"Bah, my good Rex," he said; "you fatigue me with your sermons. You always did, even in the long ago, when you and I were not such bad friends as we appear to be to-day. But surely we have not met to quarrel. That would not suit my purpose, milord Englishman, nor yours either, unless I am greatly mistaken. You cannot say that I have ever meddled with your comfort or freedom since—since we came to an understanding when I last had the pleasure of seeing you at Pera. Well, let it be as it has been. You see I am free again; I owe nothing to my friends to whom you so kindly think of betraying me, and I care nothing for your threats. But do not suppose that I mean to annoy you. Oh, no! our paths lie far apart. There is no need for them to mingle—just now at all events. Take your own way, most illustrious islander—it will be a strange one, doubtless. But so long as you fulfil your part of our agreement I shall fulfil mine."

It was evident that the venomous hatred which the man infused into his voice as he uttered these words was treated with supreme indifference by Rex. Even whilst Calanis was speaking he seemed more intent upon watching the bench on which Gladys was seated than on observing the countenance of the Greek. The latter followed the direction of Mansfield's glance.

"Yes," he continued, with a malicious grin upon his ill-favoured face, "the young lady is undoubtedly beautiful; and this time, my good Rex, she is your compatriot. Well, that is better. The devil himself cannot fathom the nature of you islanders; and it is a fool—whether it be man or woman—who cares to take part in your lot without being born to it."

Rex was calmer now. He took no notice of the taunting speech which had just been uttered with an air of so much

insolence. For a moment he appeared to be revolving some problem deeply in his mind; then he addressed Calanis abruptly, but scarcely in the tones of measureless contempt he had first used towards him.

"Let me know to-morrow, at the Hôtel de France, how much you will want to induce you to go away from here at once. You must know that I cannot breathe the air of the spot that you have chosen to curse with your presence. Meanwhile remember that you do not dare to address me personally, either when I am alone or in company. Should you do so, there will be an end of all terms between us."

Without another word he turned away from the man and recrossed the hall to Gladys and Mrs. Carmichael. If he had chanced to look round, he would have seen the Greek thrust his tongue into his cheek in insolent derision.

It was perhaps fortunate for our hero that at that moment Mr. and Mrs. Lorrimer came out of the play-rooms. Their appearance diverted the attention of Gladys from his pale face and still agitated manner. But to his intense mortification, he found that they were accompanied by Bessarion.

"What a good fortune has befallen me!" cried the Prince. "I came this evening to try the tables, and behold, before I had time to lose more than a paltry fifty louis, our good friends here appeared upon the scene and dragged me from destruction."

Gladys could not but contrast the gaiety of the Prince with the disturbed face of Rex. She was vexed and mystified, too, by the fact that the man whom she was fast exalting into a hero should be on terms of apparent intimacy—even though it might be unfriendly intimacy—with the wretched creature by whom she had been insulted.

Nevertheless she would have been glad to have Rex by her side for the remainder of the evening, and the feeling with which she greeted Bessarion was not one of unmingled pleasure.

There was no resisting the winning courtesies of the man, however. He took the seat beside her which Mansfield had

left vacant, and forthwith began to recount the names and histories of the various celebrities of the unhallowed spot who were at that moment to be seen in the hall. That he was himself one of the habitual players there he made no attempt to conceal.

"Yes," he said, looking into her face with his grave, dark eyes, "I have not had the advantage of an English training, my dear mademoiselle. Perhaps I might have been a different man if fate had thus blessed me. But I come of a race to whom the pleasures of the gaming-table have ever been irresistible. It is my destiny, and I must submit."

There was something pathetic in his manner. The Prince was ordinarily in so gay a mood that this momentary lapse into something like melancholy touched the girl; and she answered him kindly. She observed Rex watching them closely; but it was not in her nature to be cold to one man for fear of making another jealous. She drew the Prince on to tell more of himself.

"I am afraid, mademoiselle," he said, in his soft, musical voice, "I am more than half a *vaurien*. But how could it be otherwise? I was brought up among people who had no thought of anything save making money and spending it: and unluckily the only way in which men of my position dreamt of making money forty years ago was by oppressing their tenants, or by trying their fortune at play. I fear my father took both these plans—and with the usual result. When he died, I found myself with an impoverished estate, that would bear no more squeezing, and a taste for gambling that has cursed me ever since. Ah, do not think that I have submitted willingly to my fate. I threw myself into politics, in the hope of finding something that would act as a counter-attraction to the fatal *trente et quarante*. I thought I *had* found it when I was forced to fly to London, in order to escape a prosecution. But, alas! now that my little scrape has been forgotten, and that I can go back to Bucharest again whenever I please, I have lost my taste for the game of politics; and here I am, you see, a moth

drawn to the candle which has singed its wings so often, and in which it will probably be shrivelled up some day."

"But don't you think it very foolish of the moth to come near the candle, if that is the case?" asked Gladys.

"Ah, you speak as everybody else does, Miss Fane. I had hoped you would have helped me. Believe me, dear *mademoiselle*," he continued, his voice sinking to a low, deep whisper, "I need help; I need it more than any poor wretch who is now meditating suicide in yonder rooms. And I think you can give me that help, if you will."

He paused and fixed his eloquent eyes upon her own. "What, I give you help, Prince Bessarion!" said Gladys, with a laugh. She was a little touched and a little interested in the man; but that was all. "Come," she added, "do you not see that the Lorrimers and Mrs. Carmichael are already moving, and there is Mr. Mansfield looking daggers and lost trains at us."

She looked across the hall to where Rex was standing laden with the cloaks of the party. Her look was an unmistakable invitation to him to join her; but either he did not see it or purposely ignored its meaning. She was not one to submit quietly to treatment like this. Without another word she took the proffered arm of the Prince, and followed her friends towards the vestibule.

In the meantime some one had been watching the party with eager eyes from the darkest corner of the hall. It was the Greek, Calanis.

"So!" he said to himself as they passed out. "The Prince is *lizi* with the girl also. That is delicious. My proud Englishman must be a little more careful now, or rather more liberal, if he wishes to escape me. Pst! The gross John Bull was mad this evening; and all because Dimitri Calanis, forsooth, had the audacity to address him!"

Poor Rex was in no enviable state of mind as the party went to the train which was to convey them back to Nice. He made no attempt to interrupt the conversation between Prince

Bessarion and Gladys. Nevertheless he watched them uneasily. It was impossible that he should not feel suspicious of the Prince, after the communication which had been made to him by Bielski; and everything that he had seen of him seemed to confirm his suspicions. His love of introducing big names into his conversation; the mystery as to his antecedents; the aimless manner in which he seemed to flit about between city and city, all struck him as indicating that the man was very different from what he professed to be, and he marvelled within himself at the fact that such a girl as Gladys, who had seen so much of the best society in Europe, should not be able to detect the sham. He hardly did justice to Bessarion's power of pleasing when he wished to please, and to the fascinations of a man who had long since become a past master in all the little arts of the most dangerous and seductive game in which the sons and daughters of Eve are permitted to indulge themselves. If he himself had known more of "the primrose path of dalliance," perhaps he would not have felt so much surprise when he saw that the Prince was manifestly making a good impression upon Gladys; but, at the same time, if he had known more of the heart of the girl, of the purity and the pride of her, he would never have gone so far astray as to imagine that she was in any danger of bestowing her love upon one whom he strongly suspected of being nothing better than a very clever and accomplished *chevalier d'industrie*.

He groaned within himself at the thought of the promise which he had given to Bielski, not to betray any of his doubts with regard to Bessarion. Good Mrs. Carmichael, who wondered at his absent manner, nearly brought matters to a crisis by asking him point-blank, as they walked to the station, what he thought of the Prince. But he restrained himself so far as to say merely, "I should like to know more about him before answering that question."

So the day which had opened so pleasantly, and which at one time seemed to be one of such unclouded enjoyment to all of the little party, did not end quite so brightly for some of

as they had hoped. It is a way which such days too have. The "red sky of the morning" is not the sky which the weather-wise love to see.

lady, when she went to her own room at night, felt tired and dispirited. The excitement which had filled her on the way to Monte Carlo had subsided completely, and left her with a certain degree of flatness. She was perplexed and even angry by the conduct of Mansfield. He had been so thoughtful a companion during the earlier part of the day; had tried to satisfy all her wishes so carefully; had talked so kindly and cheerfully, that she could not understand the air of cold reserve and constraint in which he had been wrapped on their journey home. Nor could she comprehend how it came to pass that a man should have any knowledge of Calanis. It was a mystery; and above all things in this world she hated mysteries, especially when they affected those whom she liked.

Perhaps if she could have seen Rex, as he walked up and down his sitting-room in the Hôtel de France, the picture of dejection, she might have felt even more pity for him than that which Prince Bessarion, with his sweet voice and winning manner, had succeeded in inspiring her during their talk at the Casino.





CHAPTER XXVI.

IN WONDERLAND.



COUPLE of mornings after the visit to Monte Carlo, two letters were brought to Rex as he was taking coffee in his sunny room, looking out towards the Pont des Anges and the sea, at the Hôtel de France.

"Hôtel de Paris, Monte Carlo,

"January 12.

"DEAR AND MUCH-HONOURED SIR,—Your humble servant has thought of the request you deigned to make to him yesterday at the Establishment. You did him the honour to ask what payment he would accept as a recompense for the immediate termination of his visit to Monte Carlo. In one word, my dear but too proud Mr. Mansfield, I can accept nothing.

"You will look surprised when you read that sentence. What would I not give to see your face when you find it written there—'nothing.' Tell me, my friend, frankly; you did not expect it, did you? Yea; I am free to admit that there has been nothing in your past experience of Dimitri Calanis to lead you to anticipate such self-sacrifice on his part.

"But the times are changed for him as for the proud and illustrious Englishman whom he addresses. Who would have thought to see the little Calanis refusing money when it was offered to him? Yes; but who would have thought to see the spotless Mr. Mansfield making love at Monte Carlo?

"Forgive, even as ye are forgiven. 'Tis a noble precept, common to both our creeds, my worthy Rex. I ask you to forgive me, not only for anything that may have happened in by-gone years to raise in your breast an unworthy suspicion of my devoted loyalty to your illustrious self; but also, for saying that at this moment it is absolutely impossible for me, save at a sacrifice which you would be the last to wish me to make, to leave this spot. For I, too, dear brother, have an affair of my own in hand. It is chaste; it is delightful; and it is very secret.

"But whilst I ask your forgiveness for thus failing to comply with your demand, I would assure you on my part of my readiness to overlook conduct which perhaps I might have some claim to resent. Have no fear of any interference of mine with your little plans and pleasure. The one whose natural guardian I have a right to consider myself can feel no hurt from that which is not seen, and I—I am man of the world enough to leave you to take your own way. So accept, my honoured friend, every mark of respect and affection from your devoted

"CALANIS."

Rex dropped the letter into the wood fire which burned brightly in the stove, as though it had been some foul and noxious thing that had by chance alighted on his hand. There was more than scorn written on his face: there was a disgust unutterable, such as might be excited in one who found himself face to face with some loathsome impurity or vileness upon which it is a shame to allow the mind to dwell even for an instant.

Then he broke the seal of the other letter.

"Superb Hotel, Tuesday Night.

"DEAR MR. MANSFIELD,

"We have just made arrangements for driving from here on Thursday morning by the Corniche road to Mentone.

"Miss Fane tells me that you were speaking of the drive to her yesterday.

"It will give us all pleasure if you will consent to act as our conductor. Everything here is so new to us and so delightful!

"We shall leave the hotel at ten, and shall take luncheon with us.

"Believe me, dear Mr. Mansfield,

"Yours sincerely,

"ANNIE CARMICHAEL."

It might have been thought that this second letter would have chased from Mansfield's face the deep cloud which had settled upon it after he had read the epistle of Calanis. But it had not this effect. On the contrary, it almost seemed that it added to his perplexity and gravity. He paced the floor of his room uneasily, apparently lost in thought. Whatever the struggle which was passing in his mind might be, however, it ended eventually in his writing the following note:

"Hôtel de France, Wednesday.

"DEAR MRS. CARMICHAEL,

"I am at your service, and shall be happy to join your party at ten to-morrow. You know, I suppose, that the road from Nice to Mentone is commonly reputed to be the most beautiful in the world.

"I trust that you are all well after the fatigues of the day at Monte Carlo. I thought Miss Fane seemed to be much tired at night.

"Yours very sincerely,

"REX MANSFIELD."

It was one of the brightest days of that wonderful January

when the little party set off from the door of the Superb. At the last moment Mrs. Lorrimer was prevented by a severe headache from accompanying them; the consequence being that they formed what the French, in their expressive phrase, call a square party. They had hardly got out of the Boulevard de la Buffa, in which the Superb is situated, before they had naturally mated themselves as square parties have a knack of doing. Rex found himself talking to Gladys, whilst Mrs. Carmichael engaged the attentions of Lorrimer.

It was impossible for any one to feel low-spirited on such a day as this; and whatever Mansfield's cares might be he had evidently banished them all from his mind, or at least from his face. Gladys looked charming; and mingled with her brightness and her beauty, there was a certain softness of expression which but rarely showed itself upon that lovely face; which indeed, had never been seen upon it until lately.

The comfortable roomy carriage, drawn by a pair of good horses, dashed through the streets of the town, and across the stony-bedded Paillon, in whose grey and muddy waters a thousand washerwomen were pursuing their daily avocations. Very quickly the houses were left behind; the road now lying between lofty walls, on either side of which were gardens filled with orange and olive trees. Suddenly, at the foot of a gentle rise, the driver pulled up and looked about him inquiringly. Nobody was to be seen—yet apparently the man expected some one. He whistled long and loudly; and then, raising his voice, sent a shrill cry echoing down the walled road. The French which he spoke was unintelligible, even to Gladys, so that no explanation could be obtained of the sudden pause.

At last, however, when twenty minutes had been consumed in this unprofitable manner, the figure of a man on horseback was descried in the distance. He came up in a very leisurely style, regardless of the strong language which was being applied to him by the driver, who was more than sufficiently intelligible when he began to swear. Then the mystery was explained.

An extra horse was needed to pull the carriage up to the top of the pass.

So once more they started, and soon began to ascend. Ere long they were looking down upon a magnificent panoramic view. Nice lay beneath them, all its streets and squares, its river and its bridges, spread out before their eyes as though upon a map. To their right, as they looked back, rose the broken slopes and snow-clad peaks of the Alpes Maritimes—a genuine bit of Switzerland, transported to the sunny south. To the left the Mediterranean was dancing and sparkling in the sunshine, like a vast lake of sapphire-coloured water; whilst away in the distance stretched the fretted shore, until the tumbled masses of the Esterelles, beyond Cannes, closed in the prospect.

Then came a turn in the ever-ascending road, and the sea passed out of sight, save in the remote distance, whilst Nice disappeared from view. They seemed to have entered one of the finest valleys of Switzerland. Down below them they saw from their road, which had now attained a giddy height, a quiet village, standing by the edge of the river, which here watered broad meadows as green as those of England. Beyond this valley rose the great mountains, glittering like pillars of silver in their mantle of snow. The air they breathed seemed to intoxicate them. It was so rare, so pure, so full of stimulating energy, that it acted like a tonic upon unstrung nerves and weakened hearts.

They left the carriage and walked along the rough and ever-ascending road, leaving the weary horses to toil after them. Gladys and Rex were both good walkers, and very soon they had left their companions far behind, and hidden from their view by a turn in the path.

It was impossible for a man and woman constituted as these two were, to find themselves together in the midst of such a scene without being mutually and sympathetically affected by their surroundings. To Gladys, as she looked out upon the eternal hills, and upon that little valley away down below with

its houses, set remote from all other habitations, it seemed as though her companion were a part of the scene through which she was passing, and unconsciously she transferred to him something of its repose and majesty.

They had walked on for some little way in silence. There is no speech so eloquent, so powerful in moving hearts, as that silence of two who move together amid a scene like that through which Rex and Gladys were now passing, conversing with each other only in the quick glances of the eye, in the tell-tale blushes of the one, in the half-veiled smiles of the other. When at one point the road became rather more steep, it seemed to Gladys the most natural thing in the world that she should take the arm of Rex without a word. And so arm in arm, they strolled on together—alone with the sky, and the hills, two human souls lost amid that spacious amphitheatre in which they were for the moment the only living objects. It is at such moments and amid such surroundings that hearts surrender themselves, and that men and women forget the imperious world from which for the moment—alas! that it should be only for the moment—they have escaped.

"How peaceful it looks down in the valley," said Gladys presently. "One would like to find a refuge in such a place as that." She was surprised at her own tones as she spoke. Her voice was low and sweet; altogether deficient in the clear ring which it ordinarily had.

Rex looked at her with eyes that were full of meaning. She flinched before that ardent gaze. He could even feel her hand tremble slightly as it lay upon his arm. For a full minute he was silent, fighting the old, old battle of duty and inclination in a heart that was torn by conflicting emotions.

"And do you think," he said at last, "that life can be any happier, have any greater assurance of peace down there, in the stillness and silence of that lonely village, than away over yonder in Paris or in London? There are barely half a dozen houses in that little hamlet; but there are more than enough to make a world in miniature. The dwellers there must know

the secrets of existence—the pain of parting, the weary monotony of daily life, the joy of loving and being loved, and the bitterness of hope deferred—just as well as any of your city folk know them.”

“Yes,” replied Gladys, “I suppose it is so ; but yet how strangely peaceful it all looks there. One cannot quite realize the fact that life is just as much of a struggle here as it is among the commonplace scenes to which one has been accustomed elsewhere.”

“It is not easy,” he said, “to get rid of the influence of the mountains. They are the symbols of peace and rest ; and it is natural that men and women who have been accustomed all their lives to dwell among the plains, or among such poor imitations of mountain scenery as we have in England, should imagine that life must of necessity be peaceful and restful when it is passed under the shadow of the everlasting hills.”

“But at least,” said Gladys, “the people in that little valley, shut off from all easy communication with their neighbours, must be more unsophisticated than we are.”

“Which only means, my dear Miss Fane, that they are in the habit of giving more direct and natural expression to their passions and emotions than is usual in polite society. Do you not think that the naked savage of the South Seas is influenced by precisely the same feelings as those which control such highly civilized persons as ourselves ? Hunger and thirst : the desire for power, the longing for sympathy and love—these are the real influences by which men and women are held in subjection in every quarter of the world ; only, as we rise in the scale of civilization, and as the ways in which we seek to gratify our natural impulses are multiplied, so we become subject to more and more complex rules as to the mode in which we are permitted to give expression to our feelings.”

“Then you think that after all, if you or I were to be scratched, people would find, not perhaps a Tartar, but, say, a South Sea Islander under our English skins.”

“Heaven forbid !” said Rex, “that I should make any

such assertion. I only want to say that, so far as my own experience has gone, I have found life to be much the same under all possible conditions. Poor Louis Napoleon, after he had become Emperor, wrote to one of the men who had known him well in the days of his penniless obscurity, and in the course of his letter I remember that he said, 'In changing my station, I have only changed and not got rid of my cares and troubles.' I imagine that what the Emperor said in the height of his glory, every honest man whose life has undergone a great change for the better would also say. Nay, I will go further, and say that when he was once more an exile Napoleon did not find himself in reality less happy than he had been at the Tuileries."

"Then you seem to think that what people are in one condition of life, they will be in any other to which they may be transferred. Do you not think that is rather a hopeless doctrine for those of us who happen to have been unhappy in our earlier experiences?"

Rex did not answer immediately. It would have been apparent to anybody else that in talking as he had done just now to Gladys, he had been trying to lead his own mind, as well as hers, away from that unspoken thought which possessed both of them. But Gladys, if she had perceived this at all, had perceived it but dimly.

Whatever might have been the wish of Rex, however, the last words uttered by his companion overpowered his determination to keep the conversation on the safe ground of metaphysical platitudes.

"Ah, you have been unhappy!" he cried, with a great look of pity in his face. "I know your story—better, perhaps, than you think. But do not despair. For you there may be, there will be, a brighter hereafter. Remember that you have youth and liberty on your side. There are many men and women who would think every misfortune that could possibly overtake them of no account so long as they were endowed with these things."

What was the feeling expressed in his face as he spoke? Gladys could not read it. But she felt all the sweetness of sympathy from a man towards whom she was being drawn by a power which she seemed helpless to resist.

"Do you remember," she said, "our meeting at Fanesford on the day of the election?"

He smiled. "Yes; I am not likely to forget it. I am afraid that I cut but a poor figure in your opinion on that occasion."

"No; it was I who made the poor appearance. I should like to tell you something, if you will not be too severe upon me. I do not often confess my sins to any one, you know. It is not my way."

The girl gave a shy glance at her companion, which caused the blood in his veins to course more quickly through them. But he only answered her with a look.

"That afternoon—how strange it seems to think of it now! Ah, how little we knew what was coming!—I know that I insulted you shamefully. Even Bertha was angry with me, and poor Lord Lostwithiel looked pained and shocked. Do not be vexed with me for it. It was done on the impulse of the moment, by a girl who had never known a day's trouble in her life then, and who was half crazy with thoughtlessness and selfishness. Yet no sooner was it done than I repented of it. No one guessed it at the time; no one has ever heard of it since; but I can still remember in what an agony of shame and confusion I threw myself on my bed as soon as I reached home. I could have cried with anger! My only hope," she continued, a smile breaking over her face like a gleam of sunshine on a troubled sea, "was that I might never meet you again."

"And perhaps," said Rex, his deep voice trembling slightly as he spoke, "it would have been better for you if your hope had been realized."

"Ah, no, no!" she said quickly. "It is cruel of you to say that. You make me more ashamed of myself than ever."

She stopped and looked back. Lorrimer and Mrs. Car-

michael were now visible ; and were overtaking them quickly, for such talk as theirs had been does not comport with rapid motion. Lower down still on the winding road could be discerned the carriage, which the three horses were slowly dragging upwards.

"They will be here directly," she continued ; without indicating who "they" were : for never was such indication needed between two souls bound together as were these two at that moment. "Before they come I wanted to tell you something. Do you know that I have always looked upon that election as the turning-point in my life. I was a girl, a child if you like, when you came to Fanesford. Ah ! do you remember ?" she said, suddenly breaking off her narrative with a little laugh of gay delight such as was not unworthy of the Gladys of old, "do you remember the first time we saw each other, in front of the Bull's Head ? But what I wanted to say was that though I was only a child when that election began, I was a woman before you left Fanesford. I left my childhood behind me in a single hour. That was when my father told me he was going to marry Lady Jane ; and he did so the day after you were defeated. So I have always connected you in a certain way with the change that has come over my life."

"Neither you nor I dreamt then," replied Rex, "that we should be one day taking this walk together, and discussing our first glimpse of each other at Fanesford in this fashion on the top of the Corniche."

"No," she answered simply ; "it is very strange, is it not ?" She did not add in words, "and it is very delightful," but her voice and her face said all this, and more.

At that moment a little girl, with bare feet and head, ran towards them from a wayside cottage, which a turn on the road had opened to view. She held a single flower in her hand, a narcissus, which she proffered to them. Rex took it from the child, and dismissed her overjoyed at his liberality.

"Will you take this," he said to Gladys, "as a *souvenir* of the Corniche and of our walk ?"

She took the simple flower from him without a word; but their eyes met for an instant as she received it from his hands, and he must have been blind indeed if he had not read there the secret of her heart. He tried to speak; but there was something within him which seemed to choke his utterance. Gladys, even at that moment, when all the bliss of conscious self-surrender possessed her, was puzzled with the face of Rex. There was no gleam of joy in it; nor any bright dawning of hope. The eyes were full of tenderness and love; but there was also deadly pain written on that face, and sorrow and remorse.

Lorrimer and Mrs. Carmichael joined them. They had reached the summit of the pass; and now they came upon the sea once more, lying far beneath them, a glorious sheet of blue, with specks of silver white gleaming here and there in the brilliant sunshine. And presently, when the carriage overtook them they entered it again, and proceeded on their way towards Mentone; with the stern mountain rising steeply from the road on one side, and on the other the pines, and the walnuts of the upper regions, sloping down to where they met the belt of dull-green olive trees, beneath which again the golden-fruited orange groves were visible.

Winter and spring, and summer and bounteous autumn, all seemed to be within sight as they drove forward. From the cold snow-slopes above them there was a regular gradation of vegetation, beginning with the hardy pines and ending with the cactus and the palms that flourished by the edge of the smiling sea.

"Does not this surpass even the view from the terrace at Monte Carlo?" Rex asked of Gladys, when the descent had begun.

"A hundred-fold," she answered, with all the light of love shining on her face. "But that which makes it so transcendently more beautiful is, that here, at least, we get nature untouched and undefiled. There is no hideous Casino here to form a blot upon the landscape, defiling everything."

"Yes, thank God, we are free from that den of infamy," he said. "But look down there."

He pointed to where, far, far below them, they could see the roof of a building no larger apparently than a toy house, that reflected the rays of the sun from its polished surface.

"Do you recognize it?" he asked.

Gladys looked closely at it, and slowly she discerned the salient features of the place. It was Monte Carlo.

"How small it looks!" she exclaimed. "How insignificant from here! Who would imagine that yonder tiny building covered all that sin and misery?"

"And is there not something consoling in this changed view of the place?" he said. "The other day it seemed to us to be the centre of attraction to the whole world. Everybody who went with us in that train was bound for it; and once within the walls of the building we seemed to be in some great exchange, to which men and women had flocked from every quarter of the globe. You remember the curtained windows? Who could think of anything in those gaming-rooms but the play? Who could feel anything but the fierce passions which are there stimulated and fed? We could only look at the outer world then from the standpoint of Monte Carlo; and how base and degrading a view of life was that which we then obtained! But now, up here on the mountain, breathing the pure air of heaven, and rejoicing in all this glory and grandeur of nature, how miserably small and contemptible that sweltering hell seems to be! Perhaps some day all the evils of life that perplex us so greatly now, the griefs that burden us and the cares that vex, will appear to have no more important part in our lot than yonder insignificant heap of stones has in the midst of this wonderful landscape."

And so the carriage rolled onward with many a sharp turn and long descent, past many a quaint village clinging to the mountain-side, and through many a lovely glade, where the great trees grew luxuriantly; until at length the long drive was at an end, and they drew up in languid and kindly Mentone.

"You have enjoyed the drive, I hope," said Rex, as he assisted Gladys to alight. "It has come up to your expectations?"

"Enjoyed it!" cried the girl, with a proud glad air. "I shall cherish the memory of it as long as I live."

As she spoke she lightly touched the sweet-scented narcissus, which she had fastened in her dress, and looked with a happy smile into the face of the man from whom she had received it.





CHAPTER XXVII.

“WILL HE COME?”



ON the day after their visit to Mentone, Gladys sat by herself in a little drawing-room on the ground floor of the hotel, one of the windows of which commanded a view of the approach to the house from the road. It was a beautiful day, and all Nice was enjoying its afternoon promenade in the sunshine.

It had been no easy matter for Gladys to resist the importunities both of her chaperone and of Mrs. Lorrimer, when they sought to induce her to go out into the warm sunny air with them; but at last she had succeeded, and had been left in peace to her book and her meditations.

The book had fallen on her lap, face downwards, and the girl lay back in the easy-chair in which she was seated—dreaming; yet not so deep in her dreams as not to observe any chance comer who might enter the little garden in front of the hotel.

Her whole frame was still tingling with the sense of a new joy, strange and wonderful, which, unbidden and unexpected, had come into her life. It had taken no definite shape, as yet, this mystical delight; but it had changed the colour of the

world for her, and lifted her out of the plane on which her life had hitherto been spent. Was it love? She could hardly have answered the question, if she had put it fairly to herself; for it was something altogether different from the fleeting sentiment with which she had formed a sort of nodding acquaintance in her earlier days, when she had been mixed up in a dozen love affairs, more or less trivial in their character.

She was not troubling herself with any analysis of her sensations this afternoon, however. No girl in her case ever did. Her mind was chiefly occupied with tender reminiscences of the previous day, and of the one figure that had been most prominent in her eyes during those happy hours. Every word and every look passed through her memory anew, not once, but a hundred times; and she lived again through all the incidents of that memorable journey. It was the image of Rex which filled her mind, to the exclusion of every other face or form; and it was for Rex that she now sat waiting, with all the coy expectancy of the girl to whom the book of love has just been opened.

That he would come, and come soon, it did not enter into her mind for a single moment to doubt. The romance had been broken off last night, the story left unfinished. But that it was to end there was impossible. Had she not seen love shining on her from those grey eyes? Had she not caught its accents in that manly voice; felt something of its warmth in the pressure of that hand? That he was true and honest, the soul of honour and of chivalry, she would have been ready to vouch for with her own life.

How strange and delightful were the vague memories which by and by began to float mistily through her mind. It seemed to her that her troubled life had suddenly entered upon a phase of calm delight, such as she had never known, never dreamt of, before. It was for *this*, then, that she had been preparing when she quitted her father's house? She would never have been brought in contact with Rex, she thought with a sense of joy in her heart, if she had not taken courage and broken the

hateful bond of tyranny which had made her little better than a captive in her own home.

It was to meet with such a one as this that she had turned from the suitors, eligible and the reverse, who had thronged about her footsteps in those early days! She almost shuddered as she thought of what her fate might have been if she had married Lord Lostwithiel before she knew Mansfield. For a moment, indeed, she dwelt upon that imaginary picture of herself as the wife of another and an inferior being, brought face to face with such a man as Rex, and learning all his goodness, recognizing all his nobility of soul, too late; and a great wave of pity for one upon whom a fate so terrible had fallen swept through her soul.

But instantly joy reasserted itself at the thought that she had escaped this doom. Yes, as Mansfield had told her yesterday, she had liberty, as well as youth. She was free—free now, even from those social ties which might have formed some obstacle, in her past life, to the full surrender of herself to such a love as this. There was nothing that could stand between her now and the man she loved!

With what a proud sense of disdain she looked back upon all the trivial incidents and commonplace persons associated with her past life! There is nothing, surely, in human nature more touching than the resolve of the girl who for the first time loves, and finds herself beloved, to deify the man of her choice, and to make all the world admit its inferiority to him.

Gladys had ridiculed a thousand times this disposition in other girls of her acquaintance. It was one which, it had never occurred to her, might some day seem natural to herself. But now, in this moment of cloudless bliss, she threw herself in spirit at the feet of her lover, and worshipped there as at a shrine.

So quickly did the time pass in thoughts like these, that she was startled by what seemed to be the premature return of Mrs. Carmichael. But the afternoon was already waning, and it had passed without the expected visit from Rex. She was

too happy to be disappointed ; too confident of herself and of him to be made uneasy. He would come in the evening, she thought. As she made her toilette for dinner, she took the narcissus which he had given to her yesterday from the glass of water in which she had placed it. The freshness of its bloom was gone ; but the sweet scent still remained ; and she resolved to wear it in anticipation of the visit she anticipated with so much confidence.

Alas ! when the servant brought the cards of a visitor to Gladys and her chaperone after dinner, it was not the man whom one of them at least expected. The caller was Prince Bessarion.

He did his best to interest them with the gossip of the town, and in the end he succeeded. There was something that it was difficult to resist in the mixture of humour and pathos in his conversation ; in the brightness with which he hit off the salient characteristics of others, and in the frankness with which he made confession of his own shortcomings. Once, indeed, he trod upon thin ice, and yet he did it so skilfully that he escaped uninjured.

"Our dear friend, Monsieur Mansfield," he remarked, "does not seem happy these last days. I saw him at the Méditerranée two days ago, pacing up and down the reading-room like a soul in purgatory. What a pity it is, ladies, that so many of the men of your country are cursed with that melancholic temperament ! Yet we ought to be all the more thankful that the evil is confined to them, and that the women are free from it."

"I suppose you know, Prince," said Mrs. Carmichael, "that Mr. Mansfield is very clever. He is writing some big book now, I believe ; and I imagine that is what makes him look so grave."

"Then let us hope, dear madame, that his book will not be so dull as its writer. But I forgot I am speaking to those who take an interest in Monsieur Mansfield. How I envied him his good fortune in being permitted to accompany you to Monte Carlo."

"I cannot say that he seemed to be altogether at home there," said Gladys, feeling herself constrained to make some remark lest her silence should excite the suspicions of the Prince. "I found you a much better guide to the place. You told us more about the celebrities in the ten minutes you were with us than Mr. Mansfield did during the whole day."

"Ah! that is scarcely a compliment, I fear," said Bessarion, with a bow. "For his own sake, I hope that your Monsieur Mansfield, dear mademoiselle, knows less of that place than I do. I should not imagine that he was likely to have any acquaintance with the frequenters of the tables."

"But there are plenty of English people there," said Gladys. "I am not sure that I did not recognize a second cousin of my own."

"Possibly, mademoiselle. Your countrymen and countrywomen are there in numbers, as you say, and many of them belong to what you call the high life. But Monsieur Mansfield does not strike me as a gentleman who has ever associated with spendthrifts and gamblers. Oh! no. He is immaculate, I doubt not."

It was impossible to learn from the Prince's tone whether he was speaking in sarcasm or not. Perhaps Gladys wronged him; but she could not bear to hear Rex discussed by such a man in such a fashion. She was sufficiently mistress of herself to prevent even Bessarion, keen-witted as he was, from reading the truth; but she adroitly changed the conversation, and maintained it in another channel until the visitor took his leave.

Alas! it was soon bedtime, and the day to which she had awoke with so much of joy and expectancy had not brought her the man she loved.

Another day passed in the same way. Mansfield gave no sign of life. Nor was he to be seen in any of the ordinary places of public resort. Gladys allowed herself to be tempted to the afternoon walk on the Promenade des Anglais; and again and again, as some tall figure approached, her heart leapt

within her as she fancied that she recognized Mansfield. But the sun set in a sky of gold behind the Cap d'Antibes, and the cold grey shadows climbed up the side of the hill on which the castle stands, and a chill wind began to blow along the shore ; and still he came not. She was forced to turn her unwilling footsteps towards the hotel, hoping against hope, that she might find there some token that he was still thinking of her.

Yes ! As she entered the hall the porter came out of his little lodge carrying a magnificent bouquet in his hand.

"This is for mademoiselle," he said. "Shall I send it up to her room?"

But Gladys took it from him with eagerness and delight. There was a card tied to it. Alas ! her face fell once more when she recognized upon this card the coronet of Prince Bessarion. For a moment she felt as though she would have liked to drop the costly gift at the feet of the porter.

With slow and weary steps she climbed to her own room, and shut herself in with her sorrow. As yet the burden laid upon her merely took the shape of a feeling of bewilderment and incredulity. Beyond that her mind, so far, had refused to travel. What did it mean, this sudden desertion of her, at the moment when, as she had believed with implicit assurance, their two lives were on the point of being merged with each other ?

That it could mean that he had been playing with her was not to be thought of. Every time an idea of this kind flashed upon her mind she drove it out with fierce indignation against herself for having given it entrance. There lay the faded flower which he had given her on the top of the Corniche. As she looked at the shrivelled white petals, she saw once more shining upon her those eyes of love from which, for the moment, all reserve had disappeared, and which had sent straight home into her soul the assurance that he and she were one. Again and again, as the doubts and the fears that she could not completely drive from her came surging in upon her heart, her memory went back to that blissful moment when she

had received the flower from his hands, and all her terrors disappeared. But the cloud remained upon her all the same. She had never looked more dazzlingly beautiful than when she came down to join the dull company at the *table d'hôte*. Yet there were dark marks beneath her eyes, which told their own tale to the initiated; and more than one envious woman who watched her with keen scrutiny across the narrow table wondered what had caused Miss Fane to "spoil her eyes by weeping."

That night Lorrimer, who had strolled out after dinner, brought Gladys the news she had awaited so eagerly and dreaded so much. Poor purblind mortals, as we are; it never occurred to the worthy American that his tidings had any special significance for one of the little party to whom he retailed the story with open-mouthed eagerness.

"What do you think, Mrs. Carmichael? Here's our friend Mansfield gone off without so much as leaving a word to say where he's gone to, let alone calling to bid us good-bye. Now, if that ain't downright shabby, I should like to know what is!"

A mist swam before the eyes of Gladys, turning everything to darkness, as these words fell upon her ears. Then it seemed to her that she could hear the beating of her heart, and that the blood which had suddenly been driven from her head, rushed back to it as with the roar of many waters. She was thankful for the friendly newspaper behind which she hid her face; even although she was conscious that the others must think it strange that she should receive the news with so much apparent indifference. If she could only have spoken, and let them know that Mansfield's going was nothing to her! But that was impossible.

Oh, how she loved him! loved him! loved him! This was the thought that possessed her even in that moment when life seemed to have suddenly come to an end, and a bitterness like that of death had taken hold of her soul. Yes; the full revelation of herself to herself had been made at last; and she knew that this man, who had turned away from her without a

word ; who had met her, and professed to be her friend, and led her on to love him, and then gone on his way, as though she were some nameless peasant girl who had crossed his path by chance, was the one man to whom her proud spirit had ever bowed ; her love, her master, and her lord !

Faintly, as afar off, she could hear them talking of his sudden going. Stunned and weakened as she was by the blow that had fallen upon her so suddenly, she yet listened to hear anything that Lorrimer might have to communicate which would throw some light upon Mansfield's conduct. But there was nothing.

"No ; I asked if he had gone away suddenly," he said, in reply to his wife ; "but they told me that he gave them notice yesterday that he was going to Bordighera ; and he left by the train this afternoon. I have got his address, if that is any good ; but, upon my word, I am half inclined to drop him, after the way in which he has behaved. Don't you think it downright mean of him, Miss Fane ?"

"I am surprised—certainly. I should not have thought Mr. Mansfield likely to behave shabbily to anybody." The words came from her lips in a husky whisper that startled even herself.

"My gracious ! Miss Fane," cried Mrs. Lorrimer, "how bad you look ! Why, your face ain't got more colour in it than a tablecloth."

"My darling, you have looked ill all the evening. It is this hot room. I saw you turning pale just before Mr. Lorrimer came in ; but this news about Mr. Mansfield has excited us so much that I am afraid I have neglected my duty and not looked after you as I should have done."

It was Mrs. Carmichael who spoke, and whose motherly arms were round Gladys in an instant ; and let us hope that the white lie by means of which she sought to shield the girl's secret from the eyes of the others was one of those which the tears of the recording angel blot from the awful volume.

She did not force her sympathy upon Gladys. She had learned to understand the girl too well to make this mistake.

But she soothed her and waited upon her as her own mother might have done in such a case. She accompanied her to her room, and remained beside her whilst she undressed. Before she left her for the night she kissed with tenderness the white, tearless face that lay upon a pillow hardly more white than it was, and whispered in her ear, "Do not despair, my darling. Things will look better in the morning than they do to-night."

Marvellous sympathy of pure womanhood, that needs no words to evoke it; that can subsist unnourished even by the requital of confidence, and that has a language all its own, the full sweetness and sufficiency of which only those who have profited by its ministrations know!

For many long hours of the dark night Gladys lay in speechless misery. Now, at least, she could not hide from herself the consciousness that the thing which she dreaded had overtaken her. The proud and beautiful girl, to whom so many had sued in vain, had now herself to drink deep of the cup of pain and humiliation. Is it wonderful that, as she tossed on her bed, she should more than once have visited herself with fierce reproaches? Now, for the first time in her life, she understood what were the pains which, with an unheeding hand, she had so often caused others to suffer in the past. She smiled bitterly as she thought that a dozen men with whom she had trifled in those years of thoughtless license were now avenged.

And yet again there came into the proud heart of the girl the strong spirit of defiance. Who was she, that she should allow herself thus to be crushed and wounded to gratify a man's capricious fancy? And who was Mansfield, that she should thus abase herself because he had seen fit to turn away from her? She tried to find comfort in the thought of the men, far richer in worldly possessions, far higher in the social scale, who had vainly sought her love. Alas! there was no consolation for her here. For her, even at this moment, Mansfield was still the prince of men.

And it was in vain that she sought to cast him down from

the pedestal on which she herself had placed him. When a throb of passionate indignation stirred her heart with an agonizing pain, it was instantaneously followed by the uprising of her soul in defence of the man whom she had accused. A thousand times she told herself that, after all, Mansfield had nothing wherewith to reproach himself. He had spoken no word of love to her; nay, he had studiously avoided her on many occasions when she had given him the chance of meeting her, and his manner had been almost uniformly cold and reserved.

A hot sense of shame overwhelmed her as she thought that, perhaps, she had all this time been living in a mere fools' paradise, building upon a foundation which had no existence. But then there came back to her the recollection of his face as he gave her the narcissus, which still stood upon her dressing-table, a silent witness of that which she had regarded as all but the formal plighting of their troth; and, with a strange mingling of joy and pain, of grief and exultation, she felt the renewed assurance of the fact that whatever might have come between their lives, on that glad day at least, she had secured his love.

It was Mrs. Carmichael who came to her early in the morning, and who sat beside the little bed, waiting patiently until the girl, who had fallen asleep far on in the night, awoke. There was a beautiful smile of tenderness and love upon the elder woman's face when the eyes of Gladys opened.

"I have something for you, my dear," she said.

Gladys looked at her eagerly. All that she saw was the little lamp, by means of which her friend was in the habit of preparing a morning cup of tea.

"Drink this," said Mrs. Carmichael, presently; "you look as if you needed it."

Wearily and hopelessly Gladys did as she was bidden. There was no joy for her in this bright morning.

"Here is a letter that came for you, darling," said Mrs. Carmichael. "I did not give it to you before, because I saw

you were in sad want of my old woman's remedy—a cup of tea." Then she kissed Gladys and left the room.

The girl knew instantly from whom the letter came. She had seen that firm, clear handwriting only once before, in the long ago at Fanesford, when Mr. Fane's Radical opponent had ventured to write to him in repudiation of the trick by which it was sought to turn the election. Poor child! She remembered that other letter as she held this in her hand, and a faint smile played over her wan white face.

Then, with fast-beating heart, she opened the envelope and read as follows:—

"Nice, Saturday Morning.

"I am going away, my dear Miss Fane; going away this afternoon. I cannot come to see you to say good-bye; and so I must write that saddest of all words. It would be more than ungrateful if I went, as I am half tempted to do, without making any sign. I owe so much to you—so much more than you can ever know—that at whatever risk of being misunderstood, I must write these lines, and bid you a grateful farewell.

"I think you will know that it is painful to me to go. Yes; I am sure of that. The last two months I reckon among the very happiest of my life; and Thursday I shall always remember as the brightest day I have ever known, or ever shall know, on this side of the grave. I dare not and cannot hope that you will regard it in that light: yet I cannot hide from you what it is to me.

"When I think of your present lot, cut off from your family, your old friends, your natural place in society, when I think of all that you have had and still have to bear, and when I see you as you are amid it all, with what a bright cheerfulness and courage you are facing your new life, I thank God from my inmost heart that I have been permitted to know you, and to set up in my heart a new ideal of womanhood.

"I must say no more; already I feel that I have said too much, and yet when I reflect upon the effect which this sudden flight of mine must have upon those who have allowed me to

call myself their friend, I cannot say less. Be thankful, my dear Miss Fane, that you have what I told you the other day are the choicest of all the possessions that any man or woman can have—youth and liberty. I am one of those who would sacrifice everything else to recover these ‘gifts from the gods.’ But a time comes when even the strongest of men is but the poor slave of circumstance, drawn hither and thither at the pleasure of his imperious taskmaster.

“You will believe, will you not, that it is because I am not a free agent that I leave you thus? For the rest of my life I shall remember you.

“I have written to make my peace with Mrs. Carmichael and the Lorrimers. Believe me,

“Always yours sincerely,

“REX MANSFIELD.”





CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SECRET OF REX.



THEY were sad days that now opened for Gladys—sadder than any she had ever known before. Not even when she was waging her steadfast battle against the paltry meannesses of Lady Jane had she known a bitterness like that which now filled her heart. For her pride, which had so long been her support in her struggle with adverse circumstances, was now as a broken spear, which pierced the form that leant upon it. She loved, and she loved in vain. This was the burden that possessed her soul; and it was impossible that a heavier one could have been laid upon her.

One comfort, indeed, there was amid her pain and depression. Mansfield's letter showed unmistakably that, like herself, he was suffering, and that if he had been altogether a free agent, he would still have been by her side. Yet this very avowal, though soothing to her pride, added to her perplexity. What was the fatal obstacle which stood between them? Gladys, as has been said before, was no unsophisticated girl, and she understood that many men find the path to marriage barred

by their own vicious frailty or weak self-indulgence. It was torture to her to think that perchance the man whom she had set high above all others—the one man in whom she had seen, as she imagined, a soul of purity and nobility worthy of a woman's worship—should be as weak and debased as too many of those whom she had known in society undoubtedly were.

The long, sad days dragged themselves one by one away. The sun still shone, and the blue sea sparkled in its rays; the untimely flowers still bloomed in every garden, and the music of the band still floated forth from amid the palm trees of the Promenade des Anglais. Nice was as bright, as gay, as beautiful as ever; but for her all its joys had disappeared. She looked back to that journey from Paris to the south with a bitter smile of derision. Was it possible that she had been so full of hope and of buoyancy of heart then? Who but a fool, she thought, could have built upon a foundation so slight as that on which she had then reared so marvellous a superstructure. And then she looked back with unfeigned astonishment upon the shortness of the time during which she had known Mansfield. It was a period so brief that it was an easy matter to count the very days. What evil deed of magic, she asked herself, was this that had been wrought so suddenly; that had made her the slave of a man whose very name she had hardly remembered three months before?

She was not one, however, to succumb easily to the heart-sickness which now troubled her. Often she cried out in bitter indignation against herself, charging it upon her own weak and cowardly spirit that her nights were broken, and her days sad and listless. Yet, as a matter of fact, she bore herself with proud self-possession before others, so that none but Mrs. Carmichael guessed her secret; and Mrs. Carmichael was happily one of those women who are content to leave Nature to heal a wound of this sort, and not to take the cure into their own presumptuous hands.

If any of the old friends of Gladys Fane had seen her now they would have been quick to discover that she was somewhat

chastened and subdued ; that her laugh was rarer than it used to be, and her beautiful smile sadder. But they would still have found below the surface the impetuous spirit of old, unbroken and yet able to assert itself in case of need, though perhaps not so eager to do so as it once had been.

It was inevitable that they should see a good deal of Prince Bessarion, now that Mansfield had disappeared from the scene. He was still "Prince Charming" to Mrs. Lorrimer, and his many acts of attention to the whole party had made him a general favourite. Even Gladys began to look upon his daily visits and his walks with them by the banks of the sea as a diversion. Indeed, she would have welcomed anything as a relief from her own sad thoughts in those days.

And the Prince in very truth, viewed as a diversion, was not one that it was possible to despise. He was one of the recognized leaders of society even in Nice, where one finds so strange an intermingling of the very little and the very great. His manners, his appearance, his name, his style of living, all conduced to the popularity he enjoyed among both the men and the women who were gathered together in this capital of pleasure. At the Wednesday *matinées* at the club there was no more imposing figure than that of Bessarion ; and the frequenters of the beautiful club-house soon discovered that no handsomer couple could be seen in the dance than the Prince and Gladys.

What did it matter to her that people should begin to connect her name with his, and that in the current gossip of a town where scandal reaches a tropical luxuriance of growth matching the vegetation of the Riviera, the fact that the proud and beautiful English girl was likely to become the wife of the noble Russian or Roumanian—one never knew precisely to what nationality to assign Bessarion—was generally accepted. She was sick of gossip and tittle-tattle ; sick also, alas ! of life. She had no love for the Prince. Her heart had been given once, unasked ; and it was not in her power to recall the gift. But if it pleased him to be with her, she would not deprive him

of that pleasure merely to stop the idle tongues of tale-bearers. Thus she reasoned within herself, and thus it came to pass that the Prince became more and more constantly her attendant in her walks, and began to indulge in hopes which at one time he had hardly dared to cherish.

Bessarion occupied rooms in an old-fashioned house facing the sea on the Quai du Midi. Living at the club, he had no need to go to the expense of apartments at an hotel, and it is possible that the comparative privacy of the quarters he had secured suited him in various respects.

It was here that he was loitering over his simple breakfast one Sunday morning when a visitor was announced. Judging by the expression of his face as he read upon the highly glazed card of magnificent proportions the name it bore, he was not altogether pleased at the intrusion.

"So! Calanis," he said coolly, acknowledging the profound bow of the owner of the card with a slight nod, "you want to see me."

The Greek, for it was he, smiled obsequiously, and seated himself uneasily upon the edge of a chair. The Prince meanwhile having rolled a cigarette, offered it to the other, and then both began to smoke in silence.

"Well," said Bessarion presently, breaking the silence, which began to be oppressive, "have you come upon business? I thought it was understood that you and I were to have no direct communication."

The other shrugged his shoulders. "I know, Prince," he answered, showing his teeth as he spoke, "that it is an intrusion for the poor Smyrniote to venture into your august presence. *Ma foi!* I am well accustomed to being spat upon. It is a thing one gets used to at last; though once I was as proud of my name, my family, and my honour as you are yourself, Prince."

Bessarion smiled superciliously, but made no remark.

"Ah, you laugh at me, Excellency. The big rogue can afford to make his joke of the little one——"

"Stop!" cried the Prince, in peremptory tones. "Remember what you are, sir, and to whom you speak, and give me no insults, or I shall know how to avenge them."

"*Mon dieu!* One cannot open one's mouth even, without being fallen upon as though all the judges and magistrates in Europe were sitting in judgment upon one. But, my Prince, I have no thought of quarrelling. It is my misfortune only that I should offend and irritate those whom I am most wishful to serve. I have come to you to do you a service, if you will deign to permit me to render it."

No doubt the tone in which the last words were uttered justified the man to whom they were addressed in suspecting that the speaker was mocking him. But even such a suspicion was hardly a justification for the bitter contempt with which Bessarion replied.

"I should like to know the nature of the service and the price to be paid for it before I express my gratitude to Monsieur Calanis for his kindness."

The other winced visibly; but he covered his rage with an evil grin.

"Look you! Prince," he said, speaking rapidly, "you are in love with the English girl. Nay; do not look so angry. Is it not the talk of the town that you are with her always; and is she not beautiful enough to adorn even the ancestral halls of a high-born Wallach?" There was no mistaking the derision with which the last words were uttered. Calanis, it was evident, though accustomed to take slights from other persons, had a habit of repaying them with interest at the first opportunity. "Do not lose your head, Prince," he continued. "I shall soon let you see that my services are not to be despised. You know you have a rival with the English girl?"

He gave a keen glance at the face of the other.

"Yes," he went on, still speaking with unwonted rapidity, "Monsieur Mansfield is a rival to be feared. Ah, I do not speak without knowledge. I have known him long and well. Your proud islander is not the only beauty who has been ready

to render up her heart into his keeping. The solemn monsters from over the sea have a way of winning the foolish creatures that the men of the South cannot understand. You look, my Prince, as though you despised this Mansfield. Ah, you have not seen what I have seen—the face of the girl as she looked at him. What a picture it was! Pretty and positively touching. I only wish that some one else had been there to see it also!”

The man broke off with a look of fierce rage and hatred on his face. Bessarion, who had listened to him coldly and with unmoved countenance, said, “Cease this talk, and tell me what you want.”

“Nay, my Prince; it is rather what you want. Do you wish to have the Englishman out of your way?”

“The Englishman is gone, clean gone—to the devil for aught I know or care,” replied Bessarion with sudden passion.

“No, no, most noble sir; not so far as that—only as far as Bordighera. Look you, I saw him there yesterday; and it would not surprise me if he were to come back to Nice to-morrow, to-day, this very hour. Bah; the poor fool!” he cried, whilst a malignant sneer distorted his face. “He is dying of love for that girl. Yes; I know she is beautiful; but there are more beautiful women than she in the world; and Monsieur Mansfield knows it also. Yet he is staying away over there, almost within sight of Nice, eating his heart out for love of the Englishwoman. And she loves him—you know it?”

He looked suddenly into the face of the Prince, who winced under the keen thrust.

“In the name of the Evil One tell me what you want,” he cried.

“What do I want? Well, let me first put the Englishman out of your way—remove him for ever from your path as a possible rival; and then—I am a poor man—I shall want whatever your high-born generosity may see fit to bestow upon me. I shall need it all,” he added, with something of the whine of a professional mendicant.

The Prince rose from his seat and walked to the window.

He stood there for a few moments, looking out upon the road by the shore, and the splendid expanse of dazzling ocean. Then he threw the remains of his cigarette out into the street, and, turning to the Greek, said, in a voice as calm as though he were asking the most commonplace of questions—

“Do you mean to kill him?”

“Ah, no, Excellency!” replied Calanis. “I am no assassin.” He saw the contemptuous smile of the Prince. “You laugh, but it is true; at any rate in this case. The last thing in the world I would desire would be the death of Monsieur Mansfield.”

“A certain proof that you derive some personal profit from his living. Well, then, what is it? Stay,” he added, “there is a seat over yonder by the sea, and as the English people are all at their prayers, I think we may——”

He did not complete the sentence, though he glanced significantly at the somewhat shabby attire of the Greek.

“Your Excellency thinks he may venture to show himself in public with the man who is not willing to become an assassin to please him,” said Calanis, with a mocking bow. “Well; be it so.”

They went out together into the sunny roadway, and taking possession of the seat by the edge of the shore, were soon deep in conversation.

On the following morning a letter was brought to Gladys. She turned it over again and again, puzzled as to the sender. It was in a big yellow envelope, of the cheapest description, and it bore the post-mark of Monte Carlo. The superscription, in a sprawling, foreign hand, was as follows:—“Most secret. To the Very Honourable Mademoiselle Fane, Superb Hotel, Nice.”

Wondering as to what it might mean, she opened the letter, and read as follows:—

“**MADemoiselle !**

“The undersigned has observed with grief and indignation

that you have been persecuted by the attentions of a compatriot of your own, who has manifested designs upon you. For the benefit of your noble self, and to enable you to judge rightly of the character of the man whom you have admitted to your confidence, it is well that you should know that the aforesaid Englishman, Mr. Rex Mansfield, is already married.

“With profound respect,

“Your devoted

“SIR JOHN SMITH.”

When Gladys first read the words she did so with a sense of contemptuous amusement. It was a poor jest, which was being played upon her by some idle and curious busybody. Alas! she had known something in her own wild youth of practical joking not altogether unlike this in its character; and at that first glance at the letter she treated it as one of the effusions of a dull and witless malice.

She tossed the letter aside with an air of pride. Rex married! another woman's husband when he drove with her along the Corniche! *That* at least was impossible. The base creature who had sought to make her believe this fable must have been some one who knew little of the hearts of English girls, or of the lives of English gentlemen.

She walked across the room with a proud, firm step. Suddenly she caught sight of her face reflected in the toilet glass. It told its own tale to her.

With a great cry of anguish, she flung herself upon her bed, trembling in every limb, trembling so violently that the bed shook beneath her. In a moment the frail barrier which she had set up against the admission of the truth had been broken down, and the bitter, shameful reality had poured in upon her soul like a black and noisome flood, overwhelming it with misery and humiliation.

It was true! it was true! This was the thought that kept surging through her brain. Yes; there could be no doubting it. *This*, then, was the secret of Mansfield's life; the cruel,

shameful mystery that intervened between her and him. At the very moment when she, in the frankness of her maidenhood, had given up her heart to this man, he was already the husband of another, with no power of making honourable requital of her affection. Ah, he might well cry out for that "youth and liberty" on the possession of which he had congratulated her. She understood it all now. He himself had neither. For the moment fierce and bitter scorn of one who could thus deceive her filled her mind to the exclusion of every other sentiment. She would tear his image from her heart, and trample it under her feet. Oh, it was cruel, cruel, that he should thus have come in upon her unawares and made himself her master, only in order, as it seemed, that he might turn from her in mockery when his conquest was complete.

But presently the inevitable reaction came; and tears which brought relief to her hot heart flowed freely. She found herself, despite her own wish, eagerly seeking to justify him. She remembered that he had spoken no word of love to her; she recalled all the little signs of coldness and reserve which had offended her at the outset of their acquaintance, and even down to the very hour in which they had stood together, hard by the old Castle of Eza, on the top of the Corniche. After all, the one moment when she had felt clear that he loved her was the moment when he gave her the little flower which the peasant girl had brought to him, and when their hands had touched, and their eyes had met, and their hearts for a single blissful instant had beaten in unison. She took the flower from the portfolio in which it was carefully preserved, and kissed it passionately. "The fault," she cried to herself, "if fault there be, is mine alone!"

And so her spirit in its anguish was tossed about between the two extremes, as on a sea of unrest and of misery; now clinging to the image of Rex with the hot tenacity of love, and now recoiling from it with the better sense of a wronged and insulted maidenhood.

To Gladys herself this conflict afforded a new insight into

her own heart and nature. She had often, in the pride and insolence of her youth, turned to scorn the weakness of the feeble souls around her, who had allowed themselves to be driven by passion into extremes of action which the polite world ridiculed. As a girl at Fanesford, she had known no object which moved her to a more bitter contempt than some love-lorn village maiden who, having been wooed and deserted for some fresher face, had still clung to the false lover, and even sought to justify him against his accusers. It had seemed passing strange to her that the heart of a woman should be so weak; and she had felt the honour and dignity of her sex compromised by these displays of a too passionate affection, a too ready forgiveness.

But now she was forced to admit that no rustic girl whose lover had turned from her could have felt a sharper sting than that which pierced her own heart whenever she thought of Mansfield; that no patient Griselda, whose story had ever been enshrined in verse, could have shown a more surprising meekness under wrong, or a more tender desire to cleave to and to shield the man by whom she had been wronged, than she did to shelter Mansfield from accusation. There were times when the sense of her own lack of courage and resolution was almost maddening to her, and when she hated and despised herself in consequence.

But steadily the better mood prevailed. She saw that after all it had been by no criminal artifice that Mansfield had gained her love, and that although that love could never now be avowed, he was still not less worthy of it than when she had given it to him unasked in the full certainty that it would be freely returned. So keeping the shameful letter, which she had torn into a thousand shreds, a secret even from Mrs. Carmichael, she set up in her heart as in a shrine the image of Rex; an ideal image in which all the nobler features of the man were delineated as it were in a glorified fashion, whilst his infirmities were veiled in a tender and kindly shadow. He would still be her hero, her master, the guiding spirit of her life; though now,

alas! he was to move before her, remote, mysterious, and unapproachable, as was the Pillar of Fire of old to God's children in their wanderings through the desert.

But along with all this tenderness for him there grew up, as the days passed, a certain feeling of impatience with regard to herself. Since her love for him was never to meet with the living return to which all earthly love delights to look forward, since it was to be cherished in secret, a pure and holy passion working in her own soul only, there was the more need that she should be ready to face the world as of old, and to fall in with the necessities of a daily life in which the real man or woman is but seldom revealed to the eyes of strangers. So, in despite of herself, as it were, she tried to hide from the keen eyes around her all traces of the inward struggle. Perhaps in her anxiety to keep the truth a secret she went, as both men and women are apt to do under such circumstances, to the other extreme.

The Lorrimers had left Nice for Florence by this time; but Prince Bessarion remained, and continued to be as attentive to them as ever. He never spoke of Mansfield to Gladys, and she was grateful to him for this. But he paid assiduous court to her, and she received his attentions with a languid indifference with which he was compelled to be content. One day, however, he asked her point-blank if she would not grant him the favour she had conferred upon "her old friend," as he called him, Mansfield—that of accepting him as an escort on a visit to Monte Carlo, whither she had never returned since that first day when she went with Rex.

Perhaps if he had appealed to her in any other way she would have refused. But Gladys eyed the Prince keenly for a moment when he made the proposal, and then, with a brilliant smile, which was intended not merely to disarm his suspicions but to reassure her own heart, she said—

"By all means, if you wish it; and I can well believe that you will prove a better guide to such a place than poor Mr. Mansfield was."



CHAPTER XXIX.

TRENTE ET QUARANTE.



It was raining heavily on the morning on which Gladys and her chaperone accompanied Bessarion to Monte Carlo. But that, as the Prince assured them, was of no consequence. They were not going to enjoy the scenery, but to explore the mysteries of the great gambling-house, where perfect shelter from the weather could always be found.

To Gladys herself this change in her surroundings was not ungrateful. She preferred that it should be so, because there was the less to remind her of her former visit to the place. The sea had for once lost its usual tint of blue, and presented a troubled and angry surface of dingy grey to her eyes during the short railway journey. The travellers by the players' train were even more numerous than usual; it was evident that a wet day afforded many persons in Nice a cherished excuse for spending the hours at Monte Carlo, instead of in the usual drives and walks around the lovely watering-place. Very quickly the visitors descended from the train when their destination had been reached, and streamed up the steep path to-

the gambling rooms—a great column of umbrella-carrying humanity.

For a moment, and for a moment only, Gladys paused on the terrace, and with rapid eye surveyed the scene. How changed it seemed from that day on which she stood there by the side of Rex and saw it all for the first time! The splendour of that matchless landscape was now all blotted out by the soft rain which fell so copiously from the brooding clouds. The mountains were completely hidden, and barely one short mile of the coast-line on either hand was visible. With a dull sense of pain, she thought to herself that this change was not more real or sad than that which had come over her own life since she last stood there. And, alas! so far as her own lot was concerned, she had no hope that the sun would shine tomorrow, and restore all the freshness and beauty that had now gone out of it. She cast a wistful eye away to the East. Somewhere in yonder grey mist lay Bordighera, and *he* was there. But instantly she chided herself for her weakness, and turning quickly to Bessarion, began to question him concerning the people who were hurrying past her.

He could tell her something concerning most of them. But what he had to tell was not particularly edifying. There was one beautiful girl who specially arrested her attention. She looked so gentle; her face wore an expression of such perfect simplicity and purity, that she marvelled to see her alone in such a place, and she questioned the Prince regarding her.

"It is *la Souris*," he said. "She comes here every year; has done so for these five years past. When she first came she was only seventeen, and she looked like an angel fresh from Paradise, with the dew of the morning still upon her wings."

"And now?" said Gladys.

"Ah! now; it is all over. She is the best-known of all the frequenters of the tables. There is not an old *roué* amongst us all who suffers more from the fever than she does. She is your compatriot; and they say that the first year she came here

it was her mother who brought her. The next year she came alone."

"And has she money to play with? Is she rich?"

Bessarion shrugged his shoulders. "I believe, dear *made-moiselle*," he said, "she is of good family. But your proud English families would be slow to own a lady who is known to every croupier and every vagabond in Monte Carlo. Money? I don't suppose she has much of her own; but she gets it all the same. Last year, see you, she lost forty thousand louis for a poor young fool who was here with a yacht. He is dead now; and he is not the only man who has befriended *la Souris* and died straightway. They say she has the evil eye."

Gladys watched the girl with a great wonder and pity as she tripped into the gilded hell. So young, so pretty, so innocent of look, and with such a history! *La Souris* evidently knew all the officials of the place; she knew, alas! many of the evil-looking men and still more evil-looking women, who were lounging in the vestibule and central hall; and she had a smile and a nod for each. But she did not stop to speak to any one. With rapid steps she crossed the hall, entered the play-rooms, and making her way to one of the *trente et quarante* tables, seated herself there, and with a business-like air arranged before her the rolls of louis and piles of notes she extracted from the little bag slung at her waist.

"Have you not heard," said Bessarion, who was watching Gladys keenly, "that there is no distraction of the mind like that to be found in play? If I were in trouble, or needed relief for my mind, I should always know where to find it."

He fixed his dark eyes upon her with so close a scrutiny that the girl felt her face grow red in spite of herself. "It is well for me," she replied, with a faint smile, "that I have no opportunity of indulging in costly relief of that kind, even supposing I stood in need of it. My slender purse would not stand many mistakes in the colour of the cards."

"Would you not like to stake something, merely as an experiment?" he said in a whisper. "Everybody who comes

here does it. Even your English priests and their wives. It is an experience which no visitor to Monte Carlo should go without."

The voice of the tempter fell, alas ! upon fertile soil. Gladys, in the soul-weariness which possessed her in these days, when "the wine of life was on the lees," when everything around her seemed stale and flat and unprofitable, and her own future appeared so hopeless, was but too conscious of the craving for excitement which possessed her. She longed for anything which would enable her to conquer herself, and to break the spell which had been cast over her heart and spirit. Perhaps, she thought to herself, there might be something after all in what Bessarion said, and here might be found a way of escape from the bondage into which she had unwittingly fallen. At all events—so she whispered to her accusing conscience—there could be nothing wrong in following the example of every other visitor to the place. But all she said to Bessarion was—

"I know nothing of the game ; and though I am not naturally timid, I do not think I should like to join the men and women who are sitting round the table. They are not," she added, with a smile, "quite the kind of people one has been accustomed to associate with hitherto."

"But there is no need to join them," said Bessarion, eagerly ; though still in the low whisper which was only heard by Gladys. "And as for the game, it is simplicity itself. But for the matter of that, if you will honour me, I shall be delighted to play for you. See," he continued, taking a coin from his pocket, "I shall stake this for you."

"No," said Gladys, resolutely. "That I cannot permit, Prince Bessarion ; but if you like to put down this I have no objection."

She handed him as she spoke a twenty-franc piece.

He received it from her with a bow, and saying, "I shall back the red for you," placed it in one of the divisions marked out upon the table. And instantly it seemed to Gladys that the whole scene changed. She lost sight of the players around

her, and of the curious spectators, who with amused or absorbed or cynical faces were watching the progress of the game. All that she saw was that one poor little gold coin, that looked so miserably insignificant amid the piles of louis and bluish-white bank-notes which lay around it. Her heart was beating more quickly. She smiled at the thought that the staking of so paltry a sum should affect her in this way. It was ridiculous, she felt. Aye, and it was contemptible, too! That was the next reflection which passed through her mind; and she felt vexed with herself for having given way to the Prince's suggestions. But at that moment the deal was made, and the strident voice of the croupier proclaimed the result—"Rouge gagne; couleur perd." She had won.

She saw another gold coin added to her own.

"You will leave it where it is?" whispered Bessarion. "That is right, I foresee a run upon red."

She never knew how long it was that the strange dream in which she now seemed suddenly to find herself lasted. She saw the game made again and again; she watched the cutting and dealing of the cards, and heard the declaration of the result; and ever it was the same, "*Rouge gagne!*" And each time her little stake was doubled.

It was little no longer. The croupiers had withdrawn some of the gold pieces and replaced them with notes. She found herself watching the money with an absorbed intensity of attention that for the moment swept everything else out of her mind. She had neither eye, nor ear, nor thought for anything but the play.

Suddenly she saw an arm stretched forth, and her stake withdrawn from the spot where it had hitherto been placed, exposed to all the chances of the game. The little wooden rake which had been used to move it, placed it in safety outside the limits of the table proper.

She turned almost angrily to Bessarion. It seemed to her that he had taken a liberty in thus interfering.

"Why did you do that?" she asked, in an imperative tone.

"Pardon! mademoiselle! But the luck goes to change," he murmured with an air of deprecation.

"*Rouge perd!*" cried the croupier almost at the same moment.

A look of amazement came into the face of Gladys.

"Why do you call this a game of chance?" she said. "It seems to me that you can tell exactly how it is going to turn out before the cards are dealt."

"Not exactly," he replied, with a gratified smile. "I should be a richer man than I am, alas! if that were the case. But I have not studied the cards quite in vain," he continued, with a complacent look. "And I know what it is to have the good fortune to play on behalf of a novice. And now, mademoiselle, let me present to you your winnings."

He gathered up the pile of gold and notes and handed it to her. Every eye was fixed upon Gladys, and many a player was envying the young English girl, the new-comer, who at this first attack upon the bank had achieved so considerable a success. She was conscious of the fact that she was thus the centre of observation. But her experiences in society stood her in good stead at that moment, which must otherwise have been full of embarrassment for her, and with perfect self-possession she received the money from Bessarion.

"You will find that you have won a hundred and twenty-eight louis," he said, "for red has turned up seven times."

"But it is your money, not mine," cried Gladys, a sudden tremor seizing her. "It was you who put my poor little coin upon red. I cannot take all this, I really cannot."

"Nay, mademoiselle," replied the Prince, "yours was the stake, and yours are the winnings. Rest assured that if I had been playing for myself I should have played differently, and therefore with quite a different result."

It was more than a hundred pounds that had thus suddenly passed into her possession. It had been won in the course of a few minutes, won without an effort on her part, and at the risk of nothing more than one paltry twenty-franc piece. Surely

it was ridiculous to take the exaggerated view which some persons did of the evils of a game in which such a result as this was possible! Without being fully conscious of the fact herself, the enemy of the game whose foolish prudery Gladys thus turned to ridicule, was Mansfield.

"You will rest a little now, will you not?" said Bessarion, and he led her to one of the couches with which the sides of the play-room were lined, and left her there in the company of Mrs. Carmichael.

That poor lady had been in purgatory during the initiation of her charge into the mysteries of *trente et quarante*. She had not been so much scandalized as perhaps she ought to have been when that first stake was laid upon the table by the Prince on behalf of Gladys; for, like most English visitors to the Riviera, she had imbibed something of the easy-going morality which allows a person, whilst strongly denouncing gambling and the establishment at Monte Carlo, to stake a few shillings now and again upon the play, "just for the fun of the thing." Then, like Gladys herself, though in a slighter degree, she had been fascinated by the extraordinary rapidity with which that one poor louis had multiplied itself more than a hundredfold. Yet even amid the fascination she had felt that her duty was to pray that in the end all might be lost, and thus the balance of her own reason and that of Gladys restored. But now the girl sat there richer by a sum which to the not-too-wealthy chaperone seemed enormous—a sum which meant dresses and pocket-money for a whole year! What was she to say in such circumstances? She felt tongue-tied.

Perhaps if she could have seen into her companion's heart she would have known that her task of monitress was not so difficult as she imagined it to be. This, it is to be feared, was a day the story of which must leave our poor heroine on a much lower pedestal than that which all heroines ought to occupy in the estimation of the world. But let justice be done to Gladys. At the moment when good Mrs. Carmichael, with palpitating bosom, was wondering what to say and how to say

it, concerning the adventure which had so suddenly enriched her charge, the latter was feeling half frightened and half ashamed at what had happened. The fierce joy which had filled her soul for a few minutes, as she watched all the chances of the game, not as a mere onlooker, but as an actual participant in it, had passed away, and already the money she had won seemed to lie like a burden upon her heart.

"I know what you are going to tell me, Mrs. Carmichael," she said, as the other made an attempt to speak. "But you may spare yourself the trouble of giving utterance to your reproaches. It is quite true—I own it with shame—that Gladys Fane has again disgraced herself. But it is done now; and perhaps the less said about it the better. Come, let us go out of this stifling room and listen to the music."

As they left the play-room they passed Bessarion, who had taken a seat at the table where the stake of Gladys had been laid. He was so completely absorbed in the fortunes of the game that he did not even notice their departure.

The delightful music soothed the girl's nerves; but alas! whilst it tranquilized her mind it acted as an anodyne to her troubled conscience. She felt a certain pleasant sensation of excitement and satisfaction as she thought not merely of that substantial sum of money that was safe in her keeping, but of the interest and fascination of the game in which she had taken part. That the man she loved would have disapproved altogether of her conduct she was well aware. But Rex had left her—left her to bear the burden of life alone. Could he blame her if she sought relief for her burdened spirit in her own fashion?

The concert was drawing to a close, and already the "goody-goodies" from Cannes and Mentone, who have no qualms of conscience about frequenting the music-room at Monte Carlo, though they have strength of mind enough to resist all the temptations of the play, were beginning to leave in order to take the trains which were to carry them back to their places of sojourning in time for dinner. Gladys, looking round, saw

the tall figure of Prince Bessarion in a corner of the room near the door. His face was pale, and it was clear that he was watching her anxiously.

The fact that they had been in a certain sense partners in the adventure of the morning had not given him greater favour in the eyes of the girl. It was rather with a sense of shame and repulsion than of attraction that she regarded him now. Nevertheless there was something in his handsome face that moved her sympathy. He looked anxious and perturbed; and she herself had suffered so much of late that she could not but feel for him.

"Let us go out," she whispered to Mrs. Carmichael. "I think the Prince wishes to speak to us."

His face brightened as he saw them leave their places; and he awaited them with a smile of gratitude.

"How good of you to come," he said in a low voice to Gladys. "I did not dare to hope that you would leave the music on my account."

"Oh, we have had enough of the music now, Prince," she replied. "But how is it that you have left the tables?"

"Ah, fortune, as usual, has been unkind to me, mademoiselle. I can only hope to succeed when you are by my side."

"And, then, you insist upon handing your winnings over to me. That strikes me as being scarcely fair—to you, at all events."

"My dear," interposed Mrs. Carmichael, "there is just time for the train, and we said we should be back before dinner."

"What! going so soon," cried the Prince. "But, madam, that is a great disappointment for me."

"You must have pity upon Miss Fane, Prince," said the older lady. "Remember she is not very well at present, and you have provided her with enough of excitement for one day, I am sure."

"As to that, madam," he replied, "I may at least plead that the excitement has not been altogether unprofitable. Even

the severe Madam Carmichael, I should imagine, would not be averse to sharing in the results of such a day's play as this has been for Mademoiselle Fane."

All the chaperone's suspicion and dislike of the Prince came back as he uttered these words. There was no opportunity of replying to him, however. They had reached the railway platform, where a great crowd of persons were struggling; for the trains going both east and west were due to start almost simultaneously. Already, indeed, the whistle of the engine of the train for Nice had sounded. Bessarion ran along the platform looking for room. "Here, madam!" he cried, stopping suddenly; and before Mrs. Carmichael was fully conscious of what had happened, she had been half lifted, half pushed into a carriage in which there was one vacant seat, and the door of which was forthwith closed upon her. She turned to leave it again in order to rejoin Gladys, whom she saw following the Prince from carriage to carriage.

"No, no, madam! the train is starting," cried a stout Frenchman who was seated next the door, and almost instantly they moved away, leaving Gladys upon the platform in the company of Prince Bessarion.

For the moment it was with a sense of something like amusement that the girl found herself in this predicament. At most she would have to remain but an hour or so behind Mrs. Carmichael, and she could not help smiling as she thought of the distressed face of that good woman, as she saw herself being borne forcibly away from her charge. Accustomed all her life to act in defiance of Mrs. Grundy, it did not occur to Gladys that this little adventure had a more serious aspect at Monte Carlo than that which it might have worn elsewhere. Still less did the suspicion enter her mind that the position in which she was placed was the result of anything but the purest accident.

"This is too ridiculous!" she said, turning to Bessarion, whose watchful eye was fixed upon her. "It is half a dozen years since I lost a train in this way." She smiled at the

recollection ; for on that occasion, as she well remembered, there had been nothing accidental in the mischance. The train had been "lost," as part of a mad-cap freak in which she and some of her girlish companions were indulging.

There was a feeling of perceptible relief depicted on the face of the man when he saw that smile. Yet it was in a very grave tone that he said—

"No one can regret this misfortune more than I do, mademoiselle. Will you command me as to your wishes?"

"Oh, my wish is, of course, to get to Nice as soon as possible," she responded, still exhilarated rather than depressed by the little adventure. "Poor Mrs. Carmichael will die of anxiety if I am not at home within an hour or two."

Bessarion went to consult the time-table, and returned with the unwelcome news that there would not be another train for Nice for a couple of hours.

"How provoking!" cried Gladys. "I shall not get back till long after the *table d'hôte* is over."

"May I not ask you to dine here?" the Prince said, in a deferential manner.

But Gladys returned a decided negative to the proposal. "I am much obliged ; but I fear that would hardly do. I must just remain here until the next train is due. And, pray, Prince, do not trouble yourself about me ; I am not afraid of being left alone in the station—even at Monte Carlo."

Bessarion vowed, however, that he could not think of leaving her.

"Yet I see by your face that you are dying to go back to the tables. Is it not so?" she asked, with a touch of the old imperious fashion.

"Mademoiselle," said the man, speaking in the deep musical voice of which he had so perfect a command, "let me tell you the truth. Not for worlds would I have had the accident happen to which I owe your presence beside me at this moment, for who can tell what ugly comments may be made upon it. But since you are here, with me, alone, and mistress of your own actions, you will forgive me if I say that there is one great favour which you can do for me."

"And what is that?" asked Gladys, surprised and half-resentful at the tone of the other.

"Oh, mademoiselle, it is nothing so terrible that you need wear that look of alarm. Yet for me the service would be beyond telling. I only ask that you would do for me that which I did for you this morning."

"And that is——?" she said, doubtfully.

"Play for me! I merely ask that you would allow me to hand over to you my stake, and that you would deal with it on my behalf. You, mademoiselle, have not the evil eye; that is certain."

Gladys for a moment did not reply. She could not shut her eyes to the fact that the request thus made of her was not one with which she ought to comply. All her instincts told her to refuse it. But she was caught at a disadvantage. Here was a man who had himself, as he reminded her, done for her in the morning the very service which she was now asked to render to him. She had two hours to pass somehow. Was it worth while, from dread of the possible tittle-tattle of mere hotel acquaintances, to intrench herself behind that British prudery for which she had always felt so hearty a contempt? Why should she not, in her conscious rectitude, dare the world in this matter, as she had dared it in so many others? The one thing that caused her to hesitate was her coldness of feeling, amounting to something not unlike actual antipathy, toward Bessarion himself. The better she became acquainted with him, the less was her regard for him. But against that she remembered the fact that it was to him that she was indebted for the wretched money which at this very moment burdened her pocket. Ah, if her good angel had been beside her then, she would hardly have stopped to reason thus; nor, if her earlier life had been different, would she now from a mere impulse of good-nature have yielded to Bessarion's request. But as it was, with a face as frank and fearless as that with which at times in the old days she had braved the decorum of a London drawing-room, she turned to the Prince and signified her willingness to do as he wished.



CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE TOILS.



HE southern night had fallen quickly. The rain was still coming down in a steady, gentle shower, and the wet roadway from the station to the gambling rooms was gleaming in the lamplight. Gladys walked in silence by the side of her companion, who, for his part, contented himself with the utterance of polite but vague commonplaces. Already the girl was repenting of having yielded to his entreaties.

The terrace in front of the building was deserted. In the misty distance, it is true, the figure of a man could be discerned, standing—so it instantly occurred to Gladys—very near to the spot where she and Mansfield had stood on the day of her first visit to the place. But there was nothing now to admire in the surroundings of the great gambling-house. The one centre of attraction on this miserable night was the brilliantly lighted interior of the building itself.

The afternoon players were beginning to leave the building in order to seek dinner in one or other of the hotels. Bessarion and his companion were almost the only persons who chanced to be entering it at that moment.

As they were crossing the vestibule Gladys saw *la Souris* coming toward them, leaning on the arm of an Englishman. There was a bright smile on her face, and she was talking gaily to her companion. It was evident that she was in the best of spirits. When she caught sight of the couple who were entering, when she saw Gladys walking by the side of the Prince and with no other companion, she suddenly stopped in the midst of her talk, and a look of unfeigned surprise appeared upon her face. What was the expression of that face as Gladys passed the girl? Was it amusement, contempt, or pity? To the eye of Gladys it seemed that there was something of each of these sentiments blended in the look which the beautiful countenance wore. She walked past *la Souris* with her proudest air and stateliest gait; a hot sense of indignation, for the existence of which she could hardly account, burning at her heart.

The tables, by reason of the dinner hour, were but thinly attended now. Bessarion led Gladys to the inner room and to the table at which she had been winning in the morning. There was an unoccupied chair, and he invited her to sit down in it. She hesitated, surprised at the request; but at the next moment she dismissed her scruples, with a proud kind of indifference, and took the seat.

If she could have seen the triumphant air which her companion wore at that moment, some consciousness of the danger she was incurring could not but have forced itself upon her. As it was, she saw nothing but the impassive looks of the players opposite to her, who were far more closely intent upon their stakes and the chances of the cards than upon the men and women around them.

Bessarion, leaning over her, handed to her a great bundle of bank-notes.

"Stake five of these at once," he said, in a whisper, "and back whichever colour you may chance to fancy."

It was with but a faint consciousness of what she was about that she placed the stake indicated to her on the red; and so

completely was she confused and unnerved by the strange position in which she found herself, that when red was turned up, she could not for the moment tell whether she had won or lost.

She let the doubled stake lie upon the table, and turning to Bessarion, said, "I must ask you to excuse me. I am not fit to play; pray take my place and let me go."

"I implore you, mademoiselle," he said, in passionate accents, "to remain, both for my sake and for your own. If you were to quit the tables now, so soon after taking your seat, the attention of everybody would be directed to you. It is the simplest affair possible, dear mademoiselle. See, your good fortune still follows you; we have won again!"

A suffocating sense of despair overtook the girl. She felt like a prisoner caught in a fatal trap. In a moment she saw that which she had so recklessly put from her a few minutes before when Bessarion preferred his request to her, all the gravity and the shame of the position in which she, Gladys Fane, was placed there, under the eyes of fifty men and women, not one of whom she felt, with instinctive knowledge of the truth, had any faith in the better side of human nature, not one of whom would see in her anything better than the accomplice and tool of the professed gambler who stood behind her.

It was all that she could do to prevent the low cry of horror which was upon her lips from bursting forth. Bessarion, leaning with his whole weight upon the back of the chair in which she sat, was, she felt, preventing her from rising. She was trapped and caught. Suddenly she took a desperate resolve. Unheeding the sharp cry of remonstrance which fell from his lips, she flung the whole of the money with which he had entrusted her upon the table. The game was on the point of being made—to use the technical term—and before the Prince could snatch back a portion at least of his treasure it was too late to do so. A moment more and the rake of the croupier had drawn the whole stake into the bank. It had been lost.

Bessarion's face was livid with rage. He uttered a terrible imprecation, in some tongue unknown to Gladys, and forthwith, in a loud voice, protested that the bank had no right to the stake, as it was many times the maximum permitted by the rules of the game. The chief croupier shrugged his shoulders, and said, with an air of nonchalance—

"That has nothing to do with the matter, monsieur. The bank claims all money staked on the losing colour, and, as you well know, does not stop to count it."

Again the Prince protested loudly and with manifest agitation. All eyes were turned upon him—upon him and his companion, in whom a few recognized the young Englishwoman whose winnings they had envied in the morning. There was no one who envied her now. Even the hardened and selfish profligates who found their diversion in that devil's pastime felt some pity for her as they saw the face of abject misery and shame which she wore.

It seemed to her that this was some hideous nightmare that was passing before her eyes, and weighing upon her heart with a burden so heavy that it threatened each moment to stifle her. That it could be she, the veritable Gladys Fane, who was thus mixed up in that miserable brawl in a den of gamblers, that it was by her own free will that she was there, the creature, the confederate of this man, whose language—now that for the first time since she knew him he had thrown off the mask—was that of the sewer and the gaol: that it was her own desperate act that had driven him to this demoniacal outbreak of fury, and that had drawn all the wondering frequenters of the rooms to the spot, was too horrible to be believed. She pushed back her chair, and rising to her feet pressed both her hands across her eyes as though to shut the hateful vision from her view. When she removed them she saw no longer the mass of eager, curious, cynical faces that had surrounded her a moment before. They were all clean blotted from her field of vision; and in their place she saw that which overwhelmed her as with a bolt from heaven, a sight which filled up her cup of misery

and shame to overflowing—the face, white and stern, of Rex Mansfield.

With a low, long cry of pain and terror, she fell upon the floor insensible.

They have a horror of all “scenes” at Monte Carlo. Almost before Gladys had fallen, two of the liveried servants of the place had glided towards her and raised her from the ground. They had hardly done so when Rex sprang forward, and, taking her in his arms, carried her tenderly through the wondering crowd of men and women towards the door.

Bessarion up to this moment had been hardly conscious of the existence of Gladys. He was fighting for that which is more to the gambler than wife, or child, or mistress, for that which is his idol, his very God—his stake; and he had no thought to spare for the woman whom he had sought to lure to ruin. But something caused him to look round, and he saw Mansfield and the burden which he bore. With an oath, the concentrated blasphemy and obscenity of which could hardly have been matched among the boatmen of Naples, he rushed after them. But at a signal from one of the croupiers, two stout attendants seized him by the arms.

“Gently, gently, dear sir,” they said. “Remember the penalty for creating a scandal in the play-rooms.”

By main force they held Bessarion back whilst the big and powerful figure of Rex passed swiftly on before, with the helpless form of Gladys safe in his arms. Through the swinging doors, which were thrown open as he approached, across the marble hall and the vestibule, and out into the blessed air of heaven, Mansfield carried his precious burden. Everybody stood aside, wondering at that strange spectacle. He heeded no one, he replied to no questions, he paused not for a single moment; but running down the steps by which the hateful building is approached, he staggered across the little square and into a *café* that stood open opposite.

“Is there a woman here?” he cried in a loud voice, as he entered.

The brisk little *dame du comptoir*, who was placidly knitting behind her elevated desk, looked with surprise at the demand, and then, seeing the burden that Mansfield carried, hurried towards him with exclamations of pity.

"A private room!" he said, imperatively.

The woman opened a door to an inner apartment. Rex carried Gladys in, and laid her on a couch.

"Attend to her, madam!" he said; "give her water; loosen her dress; and tell me when she has recovered."

Then he quickly went out, and shutting the door stood with his back to it, and with defiant air faced the curious crowd that had already gathered round the open windows of the *café*.

He had not long to wait for the man he expected. There was a sudden falling back of the throng, and Bessarion burst into the apartment. Even Rex was startled by the change which had passed over the face of the Prince. Ordinarily so suave in manner, so scrupulously polite and pleasant in expression, he had now the look of some wild animal robbed of its prey. His features were positively twisted beyond recognition by rage and vexation.

"Where is she?" he shouted, hoarsely, as he sprang towards Mansfield.

"Miss Fane is there," said Rex, pointing to the door behind him, "and she must be left to herself for the present. You cannot see her."

They were both brave men, so far as mere physical courage went; and at the moment both were inspired by those passions which more than any other nerve men to deeds of desperation. But Rex had two great advantages over the other. He was free from that maniacal excitement which possessed Bessarion; and he was an English gentleman whose *curriculum* at the university had included some knowledge of the art of self-defence.

Bessarion was not slow to recognize the position. He paused, and recovered from his demoniacal passion with a rapidity which would have astounded Mansfield if he had not

been accustomed to the ways of the people of the East, and had known something of the suddenness with which tempests arise and subside in that quarter of the world.

"The lady is under my charge," said the Prince, regarding Rex with flaming eyes.

"The lady is under neither your charge nor mine, sir," replied the latter. "She is in much better care at this moment; and she shall not be disturbed or distressed in any way whatever."

"You seem to imagine," said Bessarion, with a malignant sneer, "that it is not of her own free will that she is my companion here to-day."

A spasm of pain passed across the face of Rex.

"God only knows, sir," he said, "under what circumstances this lady has had the misfortune to find herself in your society this evening. I merely know for my part that it was not, as I foolishly imagined, an idle impulse which prompted me to visit Monte Carlo to-night!"

"Oh, monsieur," retorted Bessarion with an evil sneer, "I have no doubt as to the reason that has brought you to Monte Carlo. All the world knows that you have chosen to pursue Mademoiselle Fane with your dishonourable love."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to remember," said Rex, maintaining his calmness by a great effort, "that the lady of whom you speak is within earshot at this moment. You and I will no doubt have something to settle between us by and by: and when the time comes you will find me altogether at your service; for the present the less we have to say to each other the better."

"Bah!" cried Bessarion. "You Englishmen, with your stale moralities and dull sermons, imagine yourselves the flower of the world. But you are sometimes found out. Ah, yes; your prim faces do not always deceive. Ask Mademoiselle Fane, if you please, what she thinks of her married suitor."

The angry frown upon Mansfield's face passed into a look of bewilderment and consternation as these words, hissed out

by Bessarion, with a too-evident enjoyment of the effect they produced, fell upon his ears.

"Ah ! monsieur," continued the Prince with a chuckle, "you thought it was a secret, perchance. Mademoiselle has known it these many days. *That*," he added, with an emphasis that was almost devilish in its significance, "was the reason of her fainting just now. You thought it was because of my quarrel with the bank, I imagine. Make no mistake. Mademoiselle Fane and I understand each other perfectly. Oh, yes ; the time has not gone unimproved since you deprived us of the pleasure of your august society. We need no one now to act as go-between. But it was when she saw the gentleman—the compatriot!—who had wooed her, forgetful of the fact that there was some one else to whom he was bound by law, that her feelings overcame her."

"Liar and villain !" cried Mansfield, at last stung out of any appearance of coolness. "If you think that you can make me believe that this lady is your accomplice you are even more foolish than wicked. Your dupe she may be, but that is all ; and rest well assured that you will never again have the chance of dishonouring her as you have done to-day."

At that moment Rex saw, to his inexpressible relief, the familiar figure of Mrs. Carmichael hurrying past the *café* towards the gaming-rooms. How it happened that she had reappeared so opportunely may be easily explained. Distressed at the accident which had separated her temporarily from Gladys, she had left the train at Monaco, determined to return at once to her charge. Fortunately another train for Monte Carlo was almost due at the time ; and she thus found herself back at the spot where she had left Gladys within less than an hour of her hurried departure.

Mansfield pushed past Bessarion, and running out into the square, soon overtook Mrs. Carmichael.

"Oh, Mr. Mansfield, *you* here?" she exclaimed. "I am so thankful. I have lost Gladys. She is with Prince Bessarion. She was accidentally left behind when the train started for

Nice an hour ago. They told me at the station that they thought she and the Prince had returned to the rooms; but that cannot, I am sure, be the case."

A grateful sense of relief came into the heart of Mansfield when he heard even this incomplete account of the circumstances under which Gladys had been left alone in the charge of such a man as Bessarion. He felt almost happy again.

"Thank God, Mrs. Carmichael, matters are no worse than they are; but I confess I cannot understand how you could allow yourself to be separated from her even for a moment, in such a place as this."

"Do not blame me, Mr. Mansfield. If you only knew what I feel about it, you would pity me. I tried to get out of the train when I found that Gladys was left behind; but they prevented me. Where is she now? You must have seen her."

"She is here," replied Rex, leading Mrs. Carmichael into the *café*. "She has been agitated, and is ill. I can explain to you afterwards, if you will allow me to do so, how this person protected Miss Fane, when she was unfortunately left by accident in his care."

He pointed with a scornful gesture at Bessarion as he spoke; nor could he hide the triumphant flash of his eyes as he let the Prince know that he had learned how it was that Gladys had fallen into his hands.

Mrs. Carmichael did not stop even to look at Bessarion. She hurried into the inner room, where Gladys was slowly coming back to consciousness.

"Now, monsieur!" said Bessarion, approaching so close to Mansfield that the latter believed he was about to receive a blow from his antagonist. "Now, monsieur, you will understand that I demand satisfaction, and at once."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Rex, with perfect coolness. "But we are not going to give the talebearers of Nice the opportunity of bringing the name of a lady into our quarrel. If you will be good enough to make an appointment with me

at the Cercle, I shall be there without fail, and give you a pretext for challenging me."

"Then let us meet there at eleven to-night," said Bessarion, and without another word he left the *café*.

Rex took a seat beside the door which separated him from the woman whom he loved. He had not recovered from the bewilderment of the past hour. Event had crowded upon event with such rapidity that he had been left, as it were, breathless by the rapid march of exciting incidents. It seemed barely five minutes since he had been standing alone in the rain on the spot where he and Gladys had stood together in the sunshine a few weeks ago, wondering where she was now, and how she was occupied. As a matter of fact it was scarcely an hour by the clock since then; and yet the emotions of a lifetime seemed to have been crowded into that hour. He remembered now seeing a couple whose figures had appeared familiar to him passing him at a little distance as he stood on the terrace in the rain. It was not the gloom of the evening alone that had prevented his recognizing Gladys. It was the utter impossibility that it could be the girl whom he regarded as the purest and best of her sex who was thus walking in such a place, with no companion but a man. Then he reflected upon how he went into the gaming-rooms, bitter and depressed, with his mind full of his last visit to the place when she was with him; and how by and by he had been attracted to one table by the unusual sound of loud voices; and how he had seen there, as all but the central figure in that shameful brawl, the woman whom he loved! The bitterness of that instant when he recognized her seated at that table in the company of harlots and *roués*, and sitting there as the avowed agent of Bessarion, had been as the bitterness of death to him.

But now there was something else that weighed upon his mind even more heavily than did that discovery of Gladys among the gamblers. For that hateful incident had been in part explained to him by the few words spoken by Mrs. Carmichael; and with joyful eagerness he had made haste to accept the full

vindication of Gladys that this explanation, incomplete though it might be, afforded to him. But he had heard from Besarion, and he did not doubt the truth of his statement, that Gladys knew the secret of his life. How she must hate and despise him, he thought! Then, like many another man, he cursed the hour which had led him into that fatal network of unconscious deceit in which he had finally been entangled so completely. How much better it would have been for her, if not for himself, if they had never met! How much better it would have been for every one if he had never been born.

As he sat thus absorbed in gloomy reflections and self-reproachings the door of the little room opened, and Mrs. Carmichael appeared. She looked very grave.

"Gladys is better now, Mr. Mansfield," she said, in gentle tones; "but she has had a dreadful shock, and even now I hardly think her mind is clear. She has got some strange ideas into her head."

The poor woman looked singularly embarrassed as she spoke. It was evident there was something on her mind or which she was afraid to unburden herself.

"Perhaps," she continued, "you would get a carriage for us. She is not fit to walk, even though it be only down to the station." Then she added suddenly, "Oh, why did you leave us, Mr. Mansfield? Everything has gone wrong since then."

But she did not wait to hear his answer, if he had any to make to her appeal. She hastily turned, and went into the room to Gladys.

The carriage was quickly at the door of the *café*. Rex waited, bareheaded, for Gladys. Presently she appeared by the side of Mrs. Carmichael. She had evidently made a great effort, in order that she might walk without assistance. He offered her his arm, however, and she took it, with a murmured word of thanks. He could feel her hand trembling where it lay, close to his.

Silently they got into the carriage, and drove away from the gas-lit square, and down by the winding road to the station.

The rain had ceased, and the fresh, cold air from the mountains revived Gladys, whose face had been marble-white when she emerged from the little inner room at the *café*. But she did not speak. She lay back in the open carriage, looking up at the far-off stars, whose cold purity put to shame the garish illumination of the gambling-house.

When they reached the station they found the train for Nice was already drawn up at the platform. It was a relief to Rex to busy himself in procuring a reserved *coupé* for Gladys and Mrs. Carmichael. He did not tell them that he, too, had to travel by the train. They imagined that he was returning to Bordighera, and bade him farewell.

There was a faint smile on the face of Gladys as she said "Good-bye" and thanked him in whispered accents for his kindness. It seemed to him that she had the look of a martyr, so white, so wan, so crushed and hopeless in its grief, so pathetic in its resignation was that beautiful countenance.

He bent over the little hand that she gave him, and touched it with his lips. She withdrew it instantly. And then he turned away into the darkness—alone.





CHAPTER XXXI.

FACE TO FACE.



NOT until he had reached Nice, and, from a distance, had seen Gladys and Mrs. Carmichael enter the carriage which was to take them to the Superb, did Rex begin to think seriously of the errand which had brought him back to the gay city. And yet the errand in itself was one which might well have engaged all his thoughts. To the modern Englishman there is happily something shameful, as well as ridiculous, in the notion of fighting a duel. Even Rex, though he had lived so much abroad, had something of the sound British sentiment on this subject, and looked upon mortal combats like those which are everyday incidents in the lives of Parisian journalists and others, as being mere displays of puerile folly when they are not meant seriously, and hideous crimes when they are.

Yet here was he, Rex Mansfield, barrister-at-law, journalist, member of the Cycle, the Garrick, and the Reform Clubs, and an Englishman to the backbone, about to accept a challenge from a Continental nobleman of mysterious antecedents. He laughed softly to himself as he thought the thing over whilst he

walked slowly down the broad Avenue de la Gare. But, after all, it was not the humorous aspect of the affair that was uppermost in his mind.

In the heat of his passion in the *café*, at the moment when, as he felt, he had intervened barely in time to save Gladys from something like public degradation, he had been eager to face the villain who to serve some detestable end of his own had placed the girl in a predicament from which it was impossible to escape altogether scatheless. He still burned with indignation against Bessarion, and was eager to punish him. But he had so far recovered possession of his ordinary equanimity that he began to recognize the fact that, from the English standpoint, the course he was about to take was one which was as foolish as it was immoral.

Nevertheless, there was no escape. This fact he recognized fully, and without any sense of depression. He had already promised the Prince to give him all the satisfaction he wished for, and from that promise he could not recede. The thought of the personal risk which was inevitably incident to an encounter of this sort had no weight with Rex. He had plenty of physical courage; but even if he had been less brave, he would not have looked upon death as an evil in his present circumstances. The enigma of life seemed to him to have become too hopelessly complicated in his case to permit of its being unriddled. To allow the Gordian knot to be cut might, perhaps, after all, be the best issue for all parties.

There were only two points that really troubled him at this moment. The first was as to the manner in which he should give Bessarion a pretext for challenging him; the next was as to whether he should try to kill his antagonist. That the Prince would be anxious to kill him he did not doubt. But, although he confessed that the temptation was a strong one, he could not make a similar resolve with regard to the Prince. The little mental struggle through which he passed as he walked down to the Place Massena, ending in his coming to the determination that, supposing pistols to be the weapons chosen, he

would fire in the air. "I think I have put an end, or, rather, Bessarion himself has put an end, to his connection with Miss Fane," he said to himself as he turned the problem in his mind, "and that, after all, is the only advantage which could be gained by killing the scoundrel."

He turned into a restaurant and dined there; not caring to go near the club before the appointed time. Then after dinner he walked up to the Avenue de la Buffa. It was a beautiful night after the stormy day, and the moon was shining with serene splendour upon the houses and the gardens. The great front of the Superb was bathed in light. Here and there could be seen the red glimmer of a candle in a bedroom window, contrasting finely with the clear pale rays of the moon. He looked long and earnestly at the house, wondering which of these forty windows it was that lighted the room of Gladys.

He would have given all he had in the world if he might have been allowed to go to her now, and to tell her everything. But that was impossible—impossible for many reasons. Perhaps, after the duel—supposing he were to survive it—he might be permitted to see her and to tell her something of that story of his life upon the secret of which the light of day had been let in so rudely by unfriendly hands. But now it was out of the question. Until he had discharged his debt of honour to Bessarion, he could not see Gladys without laying himself open to the gravest misconstruction and misrepresentation.

And then there flashed through his mind the thought that perhaps, even if he were able to go to her now, she might refuse to see him. He had taken notice of the quick withdrawal of her hand from his at the railway station, after he had kissed it. Would it be strange if she felt that one whom she might not unnaturally deem guilty of having practised a gross deception upon her, was no longer worthy to be admitted to her presence?

Thoughts like these merely increased the fever that was already burning in his veins. He did not apostrophise the great white building, that stood there in the brilliant rays of

the moon, although to him it was a temple holding all that was most sacred to him in life. He uttered no passionate cries of entreaty or of self-reproach. It is happily not in the nature of the ordinary Englishman to find relief in this way. But there was a pain at his heart, an anguish in his mind so keen, that it seemed to him that death itself would be a blessing, since it would at least bring him to peace and rest.

Death! it struck him with a strange, weird sense of the triviality of most of the things of this world, that in very truth he was perhaps nearer to death now than any other of the men and women who surrounded him in that city of pleasure. To-morrow the moon would once more be shining high up in the heavens, shedding its glory as it was now doing upon sea and land, upon fronded palm and golden-fruited orange tree. And in all that world of mystery and sorrow upon which it would then pour its rays, it might be that there would no longer be one among the sons of men who answered to his name. Yet had not this grey earth lived for ten thousand years before he appeared upon it; and what difference would his going make to any human soul among all the hundreds of millions who breathed and toiled and suffered upon it to-day? He had left the Avenue de la Buffa behind him, and, taking a short cut, had reached the shore. It still wanted nearly an hour to the appointed time for his meeting with Bessarion. He spent that hour in slowly walking by the side of the sea, the solemn melody of whose waves harmonized well with his thoughts. Those thoughts had now travelled far, far away from all the faces and the scenes of these latter days. They had taken him back to the time when, as a little child, he nestled beside his mother's knee, and drank in there with the unquestioning faith of childhood some of those truths for the full acceptance of which, alas! the simplicity and innocence of childhood are needed.

Precisely as the clock struck eleven he walked into the hall of the beautiful club-house, that club-house which for situation, if not for architecture, surpasses by a distance immeasurable all the palaces of Pall Mall. He was still undecided as to the

course which he ought to take in order to give his enemy the required pretext for the challenge. Some vague memory of the similar situation which is to be found in the pages of "Esmond" made him think that a cause for quarrel might be found in a pretended game at cards. But how such a game was to be arranged for he had not the faintest idea.

He need not have troubled himself in the matter. Bessarion was not a person who was likely to find any difficulty in bringing about a quarrel with a man whom he was anxious to fight; and even if the arrangement made at Monte Carlo had been carried into effect, Rex would have received all the needed assistance from his antagonist. But the Prince, though in his furious anger in the *café* he had been willing to fight Mansfield upon any terms, had seen fit to change his tactics now that there had been time to take a calmer view of the situation. He saw no reason why he should not enjoy the privilege of being the person challenged, instead of the challenger; and he had therefore made up his mind that he would be the apparent aggressor in the quarrel. He was the more careless as to the pretext for it, inasmuch as he had no real wish to shield the name of Gladys. He had succeeded in partially compromising her that afternoon in pursuance of a deep-laid plan of his own, believing that by doing so he might get her into his power. It would conduce still more effectually to that end, he thought, if the world should know that he and Mansfield had fought about her. The injury that might be caused to her reputation from the fact becoming known was not a matter that a gentleman accustomed to the easy-going morality of Hungary and Roumania was likely to trouble himself about.

Thus it came to pass that almost before Mansfield was aware, the little problem which had puzzled him had been solved in the easiest and simplest manner possible. Hardly had he entered the large card-room of the club, where many men were engaged in play, than he found himself involved in an altercation with his antagonist, who was taking part in the play at one of the tables.

"*Mon dieu !* Monsieur Mansfield, you distract me with that stare of yours," said Bessarion, in an insolent voice, audible to everybody in the room ; "if you come here to take lessons in *écarté*, pray sit where I cannot see that death's head you carry on your shoulders."

Everybody looked up ; for they were men of the world, and at once apprehended the significance of the incident, which Mansfield himself was equally quick to grasp.

"If Monsieur le Prince wishes to avoid the sight of my face," he said, in clear and measured tones, "I would recommend him to betake himself to his bed. A little sleep may possibly teach him more discretion and better manners."

Bessarion's answer was to fling his cards into the face of Rex. There was a murmur of disapprobation from the company in the room at this unnecessary act of violence. Everybody could tell from the unprovoked attack which Bessarion had made upon Mansfield that this little scene had been got up for the purpose of covering the real cause of quarrel, whatever it might be. But the manner in which Rex had responded to the attack had been such as to deprive the Prince of an excuse for resorting to any further provocation. The feeling in the room was unmistakably on the side of the Englishman.

"You see, gentlemen, the insult to which I have been subjected by a fellow-member," said Rex, looking round the apartment ; and there was a murmur of acquiescence from all present.

"O'Toole," he continued, addressing an Irishman whom he happened to know, who was seated at one of the card tables, "will you do me a favour?"

"With all the pleasure in life, me dear boy," cried the gallant O'Toole, rising from his place and crossing over to where Rex stood, pale but composed, facing Bessarion.

Something like a smile crossed Mansfield's face as he observed the unmistakable eagerness of his friend to take part in the work of bringing the quarrel to a head. He was a man who happened to be a member of the same club as himself in

town. This was positively the only bond of union between the two. They had occasionally dined together at the same table, or smoked side by side after dinner. O'Toole had appeared up to that moment to be a genial, lively Irishman, not differing greatly from any other Irish gentleman whom Mansfield knew ; but now he had suddenly developed into a ferocious fighting man, who evidently looked forward with eager zest to a mortal combat in which it was possible that the life of his friend might be lost.

"They may well say that our civilization is only skin deep," said Rex to himself, as he observed the eager satisfaction of O'Toole at the part he was called upon to play in the affair.

It does not take long to settle a little affair of this kind at Nice. Before midnight all the preliminaries had been arranged. Bessarion's second, a Polish count who had lived long in the place, and who had taken part both as principal and as second in many a duel before, fixed the spot where this was to be fought. It was one he knew well—a secluded glen awayup on the Corniche, not far from Turbie ; and nine o'clock the following morning was appointed as the hour of meeting.

The Count and O'Toole were quite busy and gay in preparation for the event. They had numerous minor points of detail to settle. Carriages and a surgeon were to be engaged, and the weapons chosen. Bessarion, as the recipient of the challenge, had made choice of pistols. O'Toole, who had never taken this prominent part in a meeting before, was not the owner of a pair of duelling pistols, and he had to seek out a friend who was. His friend, an Englishman who had been long resident abroad, was "only too happy" to lend the weapons. It was quite touching to see how ready everybody was to oblige the party. Who can say that men are naturally churlish when all this eagerness is displayed to assist a couple of fellow-creatures who are merely wishful to kill each other?

It was two o'clock in the morning when O'Toole, all the preliminaries having been duly arranged, reached the Hôtel de France, where he and Mansfield were to pass the night.

"Now, me dear boy," he said, with an air of frank satisfaction, after detailing the various arrangements which had been made, "let me recommend you to get to your bed at once; for there's nothing like a good night's sleep when you have a little job of this sort in hand. And mind ye don't lie awake thinking about it, ye know. Thinking never made a man shoot straight on this earth; and ye'll have to shoot straight to-morrow morning, I tell ye, for that fellow Bessarion, they say, always wings his man if he is not got at first. Come, just one small drop of the 'crathur' before ye go. I can't allow ye more for your own sake, ye know, me boy."

But Rex declined the proffered potion, and was soon in bed and sleeping heavily.

It seemed to him that hardly a moment had elapsed from the hour when he laid his head upon his pillow to that at which he was aroused by the vigilant O'Toole.

"The coffee is ready in my room," said the second, "and, sure, we must start in twenty minutes from now. I've let ye sleep as long as I dared."

It would be paying a poor compliment to Rex to say that he did not awake with a shiver of dismay to the sense of what it was which lay before him. The cold, dark morning, for the sun had not yet risen, was by no means calculated to make the general aspect of things more cheerful. He, a sane man, who had lived not perhaps the wisest or most useful life in the world, but at least a sober and law-abiding one up to the present moment, was about to go out to kill a fellow-creature or be killed by him! His first thought was that it must be all a delusion. But there was no mistaking the fact that he had been called by O'Toole, and that his friend was even now awaiting him impatiently in the adjoining room. Yes; it was all true—only too true.

But then there flashed before his eyes the vision of Gladys as he had seen her falling fainting to the ground, in the detestable hell of Monte Carlo, on the previous evening; and his heart grew hot with rage and indignation. Surely it was but a

small thing to die, if die he must, in seeking to avenge the cruel wrong to which this man had exposed her. He concentrated his mind upon the memory of that scene, and when he went out to meet O'Toole, his face was quite composed and even cheerful.

The second felt that it was his duty to do the talking on the occasion, and to that task at least he was more than equal.

"We shall have a splendid morning for the drive. The sun is just showing itself. But it will be cold, bedad; and you must not get a chill, so you must just wear my furs in the carriage."

"But what about yourself, O'Toole? Won't you be cold also?"

"Oh, sure, what do I want with being warm this morning? It isn't I that have to handle the irons to-day—worse luck. Mind ye, Mansfield, if I should ever want help of this kind myself, I shall look to you for it. So now it's a bargain."

"I shall certainly feel myself under an obligation to you that I must repay in any manner you think best," said Mansfield, laughing.

They were in excellent spirits as they drove through the town, just waking to its daily life. Rex had filled his pipe; and O'Toole was solacing himself with a big cigar. Nobody who had seen these two men chatting pleasantly with each other as they were driven through the streets and across the bridge would have imagined the errand on which they were bent. But by and by, when the light carriage began to ascend the hill, silence fell upon our hero, and he showed a manifest indisposition to respond to the remarks of his companion.

The early light of the morning was flooding that wondrous scene with a golden glory. The sea and the mountains looked as though they had been created anew since yesterday—so brilliantly fresh and full of beauty did they look in that translucent atmosphere. The rain which had fallen on the previous day had refreshed the vegetation, and from the gardens which they passed the perfume of roses, violets, and carnations was borne towards them by the morning breeze.

But Rex was not thinking of nature and her charms. His mind was busy with that day, not long past, in which he had traversed the same road in the company of Gladys. Would she ever come by that road again ; ever recall, as he did now, that day of blissful memories when they walked together up this steep path, and looked upon the sharp outlines of yonder hills ? Every portion of the way seemed to be associated in some manner with her. Nay, he found himself looking down upon the road in search of her footprints. That one brief ride from Nice to Mentone seemed to him to be as rich in incident, as full of tender memories and sweet suggestions, as the whole of his previous life had been.

For many years he had resolutely put from himself all thought of woman's love. Fate had played him false in his opening manhood, and, like other men, he had been compelled to bear the penalty which had been imposed upon him in the shape of a life of loneliness. But then there had come to him unexpectedly, and, as it were, in a moment, a passion which, if it had not the freshness of a man's first love, had been full of beauty and sweetness ; and had possessed power to lift him out of that self-absorption which he had long felt to be his besetting sin. He had fought against it, inexpressibly precious as it was to him, because its gratification was impossible, and merely to cherish it was something like a sin. At last, unable to maintain the struggle longer, he had fled. Some secret consciousness there was in his heart that Gladys had loved him. He had not looked into her eyes at that moment, which seemed consecrated now with all the pathos of a last farewell, when he had given her the flower, without reading the truth that was plainly written there.

But now cruel fate, coming to him in the shape of duty, had sundered them for ever ; and what was worse was the fact that to her he must now be nothing but a man who in vanity or self-weariness had trifled with her love, practising the most base and ruthless of deceptions upon her. As for himself—was it not well, that to him at least it was given now to risk his

life, perhaps to die, in avenging the wrong which she had suffered from another ?

It was whilst he was still deep in musings of this kind that they reached the appointed spot. They had seen the carriage in which Bessarion and his second were seated following them at no great distance on the road ; and at the rendezvous, the surgeon was already waiting. He was a polite, grave man, whose manner was strictly professional. He explained to O'Toole that he was well acquainted with the precise spot fixed upon for the encounter, having in fact been there frequently before on errands like his present one ; and he forthwith conducted them to it.

It lay between the highway and the sea—a beautiful little hollow, shut off from the road by a hill which they had to skirt in order to reach their destination, and at the foot of which they left the carriages. From this tiny valley a splendid view of the coast was afforded ; whilst Monte Carlo lay almost immediately beneath them. It seemed to Rex as though he could have cast a stone into the miniature square, with its toy houses, its liliputian carriages and horses, on which he looked from that giddy height. But a sickening feeling came over him as he recalled the scene of the previous night in that loveliest of all the portals to destruction ; and he turned his back upon the prospect with a shudder.

Bessarion's tall figure at that moment loomed up on the sky-line, as he climbed the gentle elevation above the trysting-place. All traces of the passion of the previous day had passed away from his face. He was once more the grave, dignified, and studiously polite man of the world whom Rex remembered at the Cycle Club and in the Avenue d'Eylau.

He saluted Mansfield silently, and then stood aside, glancing round upon the scene with the air of an indifferent spectator. But Rex, who was well able to read characters as written in faces, could detect beneath that impassive and polished exterior the relentless determination and deadly hatred that inspired the man.

The preliminaries, from all consideration of which the principals were of course studiously excluded, were arranged very quickly. It had been understood from the first that the case was not one in which any apology on either side was admissible; all, therefore, that remained to be done was to toss for the weapons to be used, and to measure the distance between the combatants.

O'Toole turned from the Count with an air of exultation to tell Mansfield that he had won the toss for the weapons, and that he would, of course, choose the pistols lent to him by his friend rather than those owned by the Count. "These are genuine English articles, me boy; and ye'll find there's no humbug about them," he said, with much satisfaction.

Rex pulled himself together, and, having received one of the pistols, walked to the spot indicated by the seconds. He was quite conscious that he was rather pale, and that there was at his heart an overwhelming sense of the gravity of the moment. He would have despised himself if he had been insensible to the solemnity of the crisis in which he was now involved. He saw with a feeling of something like contempt the bland smile with which Bessarion received his instructions from his second. He would have felt himself degraded if he had attempted to play the mountebank at such a moment. He would go out of life, he said to himself, if he were to die now, without any poor pretence at bravado and theatrical display. Yet, although thus so grave in his face and bearing, no one who saw him take his stand facing his antagonist dreamt for a moment that he was anything but a brave, a very brave man. Even Bessarion, who had been out many a time before, and who despised Rex as an enemy, could not but admire with a secret feeling of envy the perfect self-possession he showed now.

Strangely enough, as it seemed to Rex, all his personal animosity towards Bessarion had passed away. He looked upon him, perhaps, with scorn; but certainly no longer with hatred. He had made up his mind that he would fire in the air if he got the chance. But he was well aware that with such

a foe, so quick, so full of a sinister experience, and so unscrupulous, the strong probability was that he would not be allowed to fire at all. It was of Gladys, however, that he thought at that last moment, as, weapons in hand, he and his adversary stood in the bright morning sunshine, bareheaded and facing each other.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?" asked the Count.

"Stay!" said Rex, raising his hand. "Before we go further I wish to put on record the fact that I challenged Prince Bessarion last night in consequence of the affront which he placed upon me in the card-room at the Cercle de la Méditerranée, and to that I call upon you all, in case of my falling, to bear witness."

A moment afterwards the signal was given. The polished barrel of Bessarion's pistol flashed with the quickness of lightning in the sun, a single report rang out across the sea, and straightway Rex fell prone upon the soil.





CHAPTER XXXII.

BESSARION'S LAST WORD.



Is he dead?" asked Bessarion. He put the question with as much coolness as though he had been making the most commonplace inquiry. Not a muscle of his cruel face had quivered when he saw Mansfield fall.

"That was sharp practice; d——d sharp practice, I call it," said O'Toole, in an indignant voice to his fellow-second. "My man never had a chance."

"He fired quickly, I admit," replied the Count; gravely; "but I do not think he fired until after I had given the signal."

"Ye may think so; but ye'll excuse me, sir, if I'm of a different opinion," responded the Irishman.

The surgeon was bending over Rex where he lay on the ground, the blood oozing slowly from a wound in his side. He looked up presently, with a solemn face.

"This gentleman is very dangerously wounded. I cannot say yet whether it is fatal or not. We must take him to the nearest place of shelter."

"*Peste!*" cried Bessarion; "I thought I had saved you all that trouble; I do not often make a mess of it."

"Ye'll make a mess of it once too often, sir ; that's my opinion," said O'Toole, facing him angrily.

The Prince looked at him with cold disdain. He was not sufficiently familiar with the English tongue to understand the words of the Irishman, but he had no doubt as to his meaning.

"Gentlemen," said the other second, "there must be no altercation. I think, sir," he continued, addressing O'Toole, "you must attend to your friend at once, and to nothing else. As for you, Prince, you had better get across the frontier to San Remo as soon as possible."

"I am going back to Nice," replied Bessarion, haughtily. "If you are ready, we had better go at once."

"Thanks, monsieur ; I do not propose to return at present. I shall ask the doctor to oblige me with a seat in his carriage when I do."

There was no mistaking the coldness of the Count, nor the cause of it. Bessarion bowed with an air of studied insolence ; yet the colour had for once mounted to his pale cheeks.

"At all events, I thank you much, Monsieur le Comte, for your services," he said, with an assumption of coolness, and then he turned away and left them.

With the assistance of one of the drivers who had come to the spot as soon as the pistol had been fired, they lifted the wounded man from the ground and bore him to the carriage. There was something strangely pathetic in the appearance of the strong man, thus reduced in a moment to the unconscious helplessness of infancy. There was tragedy, too, in the contrast he presented now, carried in the rough arms of these men, a mere mass of bleeding and hardly breathing clay, to the Rex of yesterday, who in triumphant strength had borne Gladys from the midst of the foul impurities of the gambling-house.

Turbie was barely a mile away. Thither they went slowly, the doctor supporting Mansfield in his arms, and O'Toole, now beginning dimly to perceive that duelling was not all excitement and sport, sitting opposite with anxious face ; ever and anon,

however, indulging in imprecations upon the Prince, whom he accused of having fired prematurely.

The Count followed in the other carriage, looking mortified and humiliated. In his own heart he felt bound to acknowledge that the Irishman was not without some reason for his suspicions.

Meanwhile Bessarion, seated in his light carriage, made his way swiftly down the Corniche to Nice.

He had made up his mind to play a bold game, for he was conscious that no other was now open to him. He had been fascinated by Gladys, and having learned something of her social status whilst in England, he had come to the conclusion that if he could force her to marry him, the adventure would be altogether profitable to himself. He did not need to be told that she did not love him. If he had seen any chance of winning her affection, he would never have resorted to the foul expedient of the day before—the expedient which had been only partially successful. His object had been so to compromise the reputation of the girl as to make her feel that she had no way of retrieving herself open to her save by marrying him. For the failure of his scheme he blamed Mansfield only; and he was sorry now that he had not killed him. He had no conception of the fact that Gladys was strong enough and brave enough to have defeated him herself, had any thought of his vile design entered her mind.

If he could go to her now, and with some apology, perhaps, for the strength of the language with which he had addressed the croupiers on the previous day—though, indeed, it hardly seemed to him that such apology would be either needed or desired—tell her that he had just fought for her sake the man who, as he imagined, had wooed her under false pretences—he might yet, he believed, bring the proud Englishwoman within his grasp. At all events, he was a man of courage and resources, and he could see plainly enough that, if he were not to lose her for ever, his one chance was to strike at once and strongly.

His nerves were altogether unruffled by the event of the morning. He thought no more of the man lying at the point

of death upon the mountain than he would have thought of a partridge which he had winged on his father's estate. Wonderful, indeed, is the power of selfishness. Absorbed in the pursuit of his own ends, Bessarion was completely unmoved by an incident which might well have unmanned any less selfish being. Full of schemes for the future, and confident in his power of surmounting difficulties, however serious they might seem, he alighted at the door of the Superb.

As fortune would have it, the first person he encountered within the hall was Mrs. Carmichael. She received him with a coldness which would have abashed another man, but which made no impression upon him.

"You cannot see Miss Fane, Prince," she said, in reply to his demand. "She has been seriously unwell since that dreadful affair of yesterday afternoon; I shall never forgive myself for having left her behind me; yet even now I cannot tell how it happened."

A cynical smile played over the face of Bessarion. He was more than half inclined to tell her frankly that it was all a trick, and that it was by deliberate intent that he had separated the girl from her chaperone. He knew that Mrs. Carmichael was no friend of his. Of that fact he had long ago become conscious. But he was beginning to feel that the time was at hand when it might be his best policy to treat her with open defiance. On second thoughts, however, he came to the conclusion that the time for this had not yet arrived.

"Dear madame," he said, assuming his most winning tones, "it was an accident, and no one can deplore it more than I do, because of the consequences it may have for our charming friend."

Up to the present moment, as it happened, Mrs. Carmichael was in ignorance of what had passed during that short hour in which she had been absent from the side of Gladys. All she knew was that, returning to Monte Carlo, she had found her not in the station, as she had expected, nor yet in the gaming-rooms; but in a *café* where she appeared to be under the joint

charge of the Prince and Mansfield. She was quite shrewd enough to see that the two men had quarrelled ; but this she could easily understand, for she was not blind to the fact that both were attached to Gladys. But what might be the cause of the girl's illness she could not tell. She was the more puzzled on this point because when Gladys was recovering from her unwonted fainting fit, she had shown something approaching to terror at the thought of meeting, not Bessarion, whose name had never crossed her lips, but Rex. It was this fact which had caused Mrs. Carmichael so much embarrassment when she asked Mansfield to procure a carriage for them. Up to the last moment Gladys had shown so great a dread of a meeting with Rex, that her friend had fully expected that it would be necessary to ask him to leave the *café* before they did. But when all was ready she had, as has already been told, braced herself for the ordeal of a meeting with Mansfield, and even allowed him to accompany them to the train.

This was all that Mrs. Carmichael really knew of the events of that fatal hour ; for she had studiously refrained from tormenting Gladys, who was weak and exhausted, and for once inclined to be hysterical, when she reached home, with any questions. This being the case she was completely mystified now by the words of Bessarion.

"The consequences to Miss Fane !" she repeated, in reply to his remark. "I do not understand you, Prince."

"No ; one would not expect a high-minded English lady to understand such matters," he replied ; "but the world is quick to make the worst it can of accidents like that of yesterday."

"But, surely, the mere fact of our being separated by mischance for an hour can never cause any serious harm to Miss Fane, Prince? Besides, there is really no ground for uneasiness, for Mr. Mansfield fortunately was there to join the party. Surely between you there can be no need to fear any consequences for Gladys."

"Madam," he said, in earnest tones, "I fear I must forfeit the good opinion which I may possibly have been fortunate

enough to enjoy at your hands." He spoke with perfect gravity, although no one knew better than he did what was the real opinion entertained regarding him by the woman whom he addressed. "I offer no excuses for myself, save that the temptation was too great in my case to be overcome. Mademoiselle Fane has not, I venture to presume, told you in what circumstances it was that we were encountered by Monsieur Mansfield?"

He regarded her with a look at once so searching and so sinister that she recoiled from him in something like terror. There was more, she felt, beneath those words than was conveyed directly by them.

"I have not allowed Miss Fane to exhaust herself by speaking," she replied. "But I know that when she recovers from the shock she suffered yesterday she will tell me everything; and I need hardly say that it is only from her own lips that I wish to hear what has happened."

They were brave words, bravely spoken; yet poor Mrs. Carmichael, as she uttered them, felt sick at heart with an undefined dread of some calamity far greater than any that it had yet entered into her mind to imagine.

"Let it be as you please, madam," said Bessarion. "I am glad to know that in your hands, at least, the story of yesterday will be perfectly safe. But I trust you now comprehend that it is of absolute necessity that I ask Mademoiselle Fane to favour me with an audience. I must see her, and see her at once."

"That must depend entirely upon Miss Fane's condition," said Mrs. Carmichael, firmly. She was resolved to make a good fight against this audacious man, and yet all the while she was fully conscious that in the end she would be beaten.

"Madam," cried the Prince, with vehemence, "pardon me if I say that my demand is imperative. Everything depends upon it, so far as Mademoiselle Fane is concerned; and should you do anything to prevent our meeting, you will regret it to the latest day of your life."

Greatly perplexed, Mrs. Carmichael quitted the room and went to that occupied by Gladys. The Prince meanwhile sat twirling his black moustache. So far he was not dissatisfied with the result of his visit to the Superb ; but he was well aware that the most difficult part of his work had still to be encountered.

The door opened, and Gladys came in, pale as a ghost ; but with an air so proud, so calm, so steadfast, that whilst it filled the man with new admiration for her beauty, which had never been more striking than it was now, it brought home to him the conviction that the task he had undertaken was more arduous than he had anticipated.

He went forward with outstretched arms, all the lover depicted on his face. The girl stood still, and bowing coldly to him, by a gesture bade him be seated.

"You wished to see me, I understand," she said, in measured tones, strangely unlike those he had been accustomed to hear from those lips.

"Dear mademoiselle," he said, "it was necessary to see you, and to see you without delay, or I should not have forced myself upon you before you had recovered from the fatigues of yesterday. I come first to ask you to forgive me, if in my speech I gave offence to you yesterday, when I remonstrated with the croupiers. It was your innocence, mademoiselle, your ignorance, of which they took advantage ; and I was naturally indignant with them."

He looked into her face as he spoke. He saw nothing there but a look the chilling contemptuous indifference of which touched him to the quick.

"You will not forgive me, mademoiselle ?" he demanded, passionately. "The words were spoken in haste."

"Words !" said the girl, her face lighting up as with a glow of some hidden fire, and her beautiful eyes flashing with scorn, "do you think that any words of yours can trouble me even for a moment ? Listen to me, Prince Bessarion, and you can guess whether I am likely to forgive you or not."

She had risen from the chair on which she had been seated, and she stood facing him, her head raised, her delicate nostrils dilated, her whole aspect reminding him of some queen of tragedy on the stage who had lost herself in the part she was playing.

"She is superb!" he murmured to himself, with an oath.

"An accident—yes, we will call it an accident, though I have some strange ideas even upon that point—threw me into your care at Monte Carlo. You were a man, you professed to be a gentleman. What was your first act when I was separated from the lady who is my guardian? You made a request to me the full significance of which you knew that I, in what you call my 'innocence' and 'ignorance,' did not comprehend, and by ingeniously dwelling upon the hateful obligation I had unintentionally incurred toward you a few hours earlier, you made it appear that it would be ungrateful and ill-natured if I refused to comply with your simple demand. And I—fool, wretch, that I was!—in a moment of inexpiable folly yielded, and went with you back into that loathsome place, your companion, your confederate. Yet, even then, I might have served your purpose without being publicly disgraced, had you but chosen to spare me. But no! heaven only knows what vile and sinister motive was at work in your breast. But to me it seems that you were resolved to fill my cup of shame to overflowing. You trapped me into taking a seat among the painted women and worthless men who were at the table, and you kept me there by force—you know you did!—until in a moment of desperation I tried to free myself by casting away the money you had entrusted to me. Ah, I knew you, Prince Bessarion, better than you supposed. I knew that if nothing else would lead you to release me, the dread of losing your stake would do so. But then came that disgraceful brawl in which you saw fit to indulge when I had the cruel misfortune to be your companion, and when of necessity I had to share with you in all the infamy of the squabble. And then—ah, it was all too late then—I was for ever disgraced and humiliated before all

those people, and in the eyes of the noblest man I ever knew."

Bessarion had listened in silence to Gladys as she poured out these words in breathless haste. Not even when she taunted him with his love of money had he allowed the faintest expression to show itself upon his imperturbable countenance. But at the last words, when she spoke of Mansfield, the evil look came into his face.

"You are too severe, mademoiselle, too severe!" he said, with a sneer. "And you take too gloomy a view of our little adventure. There was no one there for whose good opinion you need have the smallest care."

Gladys gave him a look the remorseless disdain of which hurt him as a blow might have done.

"Ah, I know, mademoiselle, I know," he continued, passion becoming master of his voice and face. "It is of the dear Monsieur Mansfield that you think—the dear Monsieur Mansfield who has presumed to woo you, although he happens to be a married man. Did you not know it?" he asked, smiling through his rage.

"We will not discuss Mr. Mansfield here, if you please," said Gladys. "You were unable to respect my sex and my innocence, and I need not wonder that you fail to comprehend what manner of man he is. But, Prince Bessarion, if there were no other reason why I shall never forgive you—never whilst I live—for the cruel deed you wrought yesterday, I would find an all-sufficient reason in the fact that you have robbed me of his respect. Ah, it was a shameful thing that you did!"

"You forget, mademoiselle, that it was of your own free will that you went with me to the tables."

"No," she replied, a bitter smile upon her lips. "There is no hope of my being able to forget that. I shall remember it as long as I live. Oh, do not think that because I see you as you are, and loathe you and despise you from the bottom of my heart, I do not see myself also in the true light. The

world has judged me hardly already, and will judge me more hardly than ever now ; but it will never judge me more hardly than I judge myself. It is hard, hard to lose the respect of others, the respect of those you love, of those you revere ; but believe me, Prince Bessarion, it is far harder and far more terrible to lose your own self-respect."

"But listen to me, mademoiselle, and let no anger that you may feel against me, whether it be reasonable or otherwise, prevent your giving your best attention to what I have to say. I admit that you are compromised. It is an evil world, as you know, and the scene of yesterday, thanks to your deplorable act in breaking the rules of the table, will be known to-day all over Nice. Yet there is one way by which you can silence all your detractors, and compel even your paladin Monsieur Mansfield to respect you." He could not help the malignant sneer which distorted his face as he uttered the name of Rex.

"And what is that?" asked Gladys, coldly.

"By marrying the man who has had the misfortune to involve you in these troubles, but who, nevertheless, adores you with all his heart."

He was an admirable actor. It was with all the grace of a young lover at the *Theatre Français* that he now rose from his chair, and, placing his hand upon his heart, bowed to Gladys. Yet, with all his command of the facial muscles, he could not altogether subdue the evil light that shone in his eyes, and gave the lie to the suave lines of his mouth.

She recoiled from him with an involuntary gesture that betrayed the disgust and indignation he had inspired in her heart.

"Ah, mademoiselle, you look upon it as a dishonour," he cried, suddenly giving free rein to his passion. "Who are you that you should treat a Prince Bessarion in this way? Are you not a runaway from your father's house? Is your name not a bye-word already in your native land? And have you not now lost the last shred of character that still clung to you? Oh,

make no mistake. The injury done yesterday is beyond being repaired save in the way I have proposed. To-day all Nice, to-morrow all Paris, next week all London, will know that the proud Miss Fane has been mixed up with the squabbles of the professed players of Monte Carlo. Ah, such news travels fast nowadays. So you see, mademoiselle, you have to choose between complete dishonour and acceptance of me as a husband."

"You think," she said, in a scornful voice, "that your taunts can hurt me. You little know with what indifference I regard them. You imagine that I would not prefer even the fate you threaten to bring upon me, the scorn of the whole world, to the infamy of being tied for life to such a man as you. How little you know of me! Did I not say just now that it is still harder to lose one's own self-respect than to lose the respect of others; and do you really think so poorly of women as to believe that I would not prefer death a thousand times to life with you?"

"Ah, mademoiselle, you will think differently by and by. You will not always think that you can defy the world single-handed. A time will come when you will be thankful to have the arm of the man you treat so scornfully just now to lean upon."

"Never, never!" she cried, passionately. "But if I had my brother here at this moment, or—or a friend whom I could trust, I should throw myself upon his pity, and beg him to avenge me in the way in which only a man can avenge conduct such as yours has been."

"Make no mistake, mademoiselle," said Bessarion. He felt that the bold game that he was playing was going against him. He had not dreamt that he would have to encounter a spirit so proud and strong as that of Gladys. She had rudely shattered the notions he had formed as to the nature of English girls; and he already gave her up as being as good as lost to him. But at least he would have his revenge. He was convinced that if it had not been for the influence Rex had

obtained over her, the issue of this desperate struggle for mastery would have been different. There was a ring of malignant exultation in his voice as he repeated the words—

“Make no mistake, mademoiselle ! You have no champion but myself ; and this very day I have fought to avenge the wrong which you have suffered at the hands of another. All the world now knows that I am your friend and protector ! ”

Some dim suspicion of the truth entered the mind of Gladys as she heard these words. It seemed to paralyse her utterance. She gasped painfully for breath.

“Tell me what you mean,” she said, almost in a whisper.

A cruel smile appeared on the face of the man.

“I mean, dear mademoiselle,” he said, speaking deliberately, and articulating every syllable as though he enjoyed his task, and would fain linger over it, “I mean that I fought your dishonourable suitor, Monsieur Mansfield, at daybreak this morning, and left him for dead upon the ground.”

Gladys staggered back as though she had been struck, and her face, which had gained colour during the conversation, lost every drop of blood. She sank into a chair, and gazed at Bessarion with eyes wide open and parted lips. Her heart seemed suddenly to have stood still. She felt as one all of whose faculties had died save that of sight. Her very brain refused to act, and to transform into living thought the cruel, wicked, horrible words which had just fallen upon her ear. Everything was gone from her save the hateful image of Bessarion, on which her eyes still rested. She saw the devilish sneer upon his lips, the malignant glitter of his eyes. But she seemed to look upon them from an immense distance. It appeared to her that it was years, long years, since he had spoken. An eternity seemed to have passed since she sank into that chair, struck down by—what ?

Whether she really lost consciousness or not, she never knew. To her it seemed that her eyes had never for a moment lost the vision of Bessarion, and that the faculty of sight, at least, had remained unimpaired during that strange trance, not

to be measured by the mechanical tickings of the clock, in which all her other senses were temporarily spellbound.

Suddenly, as by an electric shock, that spell was broken; she rose to her feet and confronted Bessarion, with the consciousness that she was inspired by such strength as she had never known before.

"Murderer!" she cried, "what have you done with him? Where is he? Tell me quick—instantly!"

"*Ma foi!* mademoiselle, you look as if you would like to fight me yourself. It was a duel, a fair duel; and as for the cause of it, thank yourself for that. If we have fought, and if Mansfield has been killed, it is because of you."

He bowed to her with an assumed politeness, the mockery of which was not to be mistaken, and turned to leave the room.

"No! no!" she shrieked, running after him and seizing him by the arm; "you shall not go till you have told me where he is; and then may God save me from ever beholding you again!"

"Then for once I shall do exactly as you wish, mademoiselle," he said, giving full rein to the devil that possessed his heart. "If you wish to find the carrion that you esteemed so highly when it was a living man you have but to drive to the top of the Corniche. You will discover it hard by Turbiè."

The agony on the girl's face brought comfort to his soul; he drank it in with his pitiless eyes as the thirsty desert drinks in the rain; and when she went swiftly past him he followed her with a cruel smile.





CHAPTER XXXIII.

GLADYS AND REX.



THE little inn at Turbie is the humblest of travellers' rests. Nearly midway between Nice and Mentone, it is the common stopping-place for the carriages of the numberless tourists of the Riviera, where horses are fed and watered, and the travellers descend to stretch their legs and make their own observations of the semi-Italian village perched on the lofty brow of the mountain at so vast a height above the sea. But, save in the case of some pedestrian who is enjoying the beauties of the Corniche a-foot, this inn at Turbie is seldom called upon to provide accommodation for the stranger.

Rex was carried very carefully from the carriage to a little low-ceilinged, ill-furnished room, with bare walls, and windows that looked across the village street. Here, with the aid of the landlady, a woman of southern beauty, he was placed upon a rough bed, and prepared for the surgical examination which had to be made.

It was a tedious business, and would have been excruciatingly painful if the doctor had not administered chloroform to his

patient. Yet the result was to a certain extent encouraging. One of his ribs was broken, and the bullet had lodged in the back, immediately below the shoulder blade ; but though the wound was undoubtedly very serious, no injury that must necessarily prove mortal had been inflicted. The surgeon, after much probing, failed to extract the bullet ; but the wound was dressed, and Rex was left for the time in the care of the landlady and of O'Toole, to whom Bessarion's second bade a polite and even cordial farewell.

"Your friend is a brave man, monsieur," he remarked when leaving, "and it is a satisfaction to know that he may recover."

"And I hope, sir," responded O'Toole, "that ye'll never again allow yourself to be induced to act as second to Prince Bessarion. It's uncommonly like assisting at murder, in my opinion ; meaning no offence to you, sir, who are blameless in the matter."

The Count bowed but said nothing, and forthwith went back to Nice with the doctor, to make preparations for a journey to Italy, in case it should be necessary to quit French territory for a time.

Meanwhile Gladys was slowly trying to realize what had happened. When she left the room in which the interview with Bessarion had taken place, and turned her back for ever on the man who had brought so much of misery into her life, she went, sick at heart and trembling with fear and excitement, to Mrs. Carmichael. That poor lady had been waiting in a state of nervous alarm for the end of the long conversation between Gladys and the Prince, and she went eagerly to meet the girl when she appeared before her.

Gladys made an effort that was heroic in its resolution to speak calmly and steadily.

"Something very dreadful has happened," she said to her friend.

Mrs. Carmichael naturally concluded that this dreadful something had reference to Gladys and Prince Bessarion.

"Tell me all about it, dearest," she replied. "Possibly it may not be so dreadful as you suppose."

"Ah, you cannot guess what it is. I hardly know how to tell you. Oh, it is more than I can bear."

Her voice was broken by a sob that she vainly tried to restrain. Mrs. Carmichael drew her towards her, and folding her in her arms said—

"Tell me everything, my darling."

"That man," said Gladys, withdrawing herself from her friend's embrace, and looking at her with a fixed and tearless face, "that man has been to tell me that he has killed Mr. Mansfield."

"Killed Mr. Mansfield!" cried the other. "Oh, Gladys, this is a dream. How could he have killed him, wretch that he is! This is a civilized country. If he had killed him it would have been murder. They would never have allowed him to come here to boast of it afterwards. My darling, there must be some terrible mistake."

Gladys had seated herself upon a couch. Her head was bent forward upon her chest; her arms dropped listlessly by her side. All the life had gone out of her face; all the strength had passed away from her body. There was no more of hope or courage in her heart. She felt that, so far as she was concerned, the battle of life was ended. She had fought, and fought bravely, through many difficulties; she had borne many reverses with proud equanimity; she had not even lost heart when she passed through those deep waters in which she had been plunged when Rex left her without a word. But now she was overwhelmed, and the great darkness seemed to have closed in upon her, shutting out even the feeblest ray of light.

She shook her head listlessly in reply to Mrs. Carmichael's suggestion that she was mistaken. Alas! what mistake was possible, she thought. Instant conviction of the truthfulness of Bessarion's story had come to her when he spoke—so prone is human nature to accept the least cheerful aspect of affairs as that which is most real. It seemed to her that the fact of Mansfield's death was proclaimed by all nature; that the sun

which glittered relentlessly in the sky above her was carrying the tidings over land and sea ; that the dark grey mountains, with their narrow streaks of snow, were lying under the burden of the news ; that the trees and flowers of the garden down below were whispering the secret to each other. Ah, the double secret ! Rex was dead, and he had died believing that she was the companion, the confederate, perhaps the affianced wife, of the wretch who had struck this blow, by which humanity itself was dishonoured, and all the sweet things of life turned to bitterness and shame.

Slowly, word by word, Mrs. Carmichael succeeded in extracting from the blanched lips of the girl so much of the story as she could tell. She was a practical woman. Though she had small hope that there could be any doubt of the truth when she had heard these details, she jumped at once to a conclusion as to the duty laid upon them. There are in this world, happily, some women who, though born in the fear of Mrs. Grundy, and in all ordinary times ready to worship at her feet, are prepared in certain emergencies, such as sickness or death, or sore disaster to a fellow-creature, to set her at defiance. Mrs. Carmichael was one of these.

"Darling," she said to Gladys, "can you bear to go with me at once up to Turbie ? We shall hear the truth there."

The girl sprang to her feet as if new life had been suddenly poured into her veins. How was it, she thought to herself, that this idea had not entered her own mind before Mrs. Carmichael spoke ? Could it be that her reason had been overthrown by that cruel blow ?

"Let us go at once !" she cried. The prospect of doing something had brought instant relief to her from that deadly weight of misery which had bowed her down just now.

With trembling hands she dressed herself for the drive, whilst Mrs. Carmichael made haste to arrange for the carriage which was to take them to the top of the Corniche. What is the mysterious telegraph that carries tidings of ill with the speed of the electric current from place to place ? It was known already

in Nice, in some vague fashion, that disaster had befallen an English gentleman near Turbie ; and the friendly face of the Swiss porter at the Superb was clouded with respectful sympathy as he obeyed the instructions of Mrs. Carmichael.

A hurried meal Gladys had with the greatest difficulty been induced to swallow before they started. The afternoon sun was blazing down upon them in all its splendour as they went swiftly forth from the beautiful city and began the ascent of the pass. But no sun could warm the girl's stricken heart. It seemed to her as though its shining on such a day as this was an insult to her sorrow. She carried with her, in the bosom of her dress, that which appeared to her to be even as a talisman, a charm, the one tangible object that bound her to the man who was lying somewhere up yonder on the mountain, cold and stark, unwitting of the love which one poor bleeding heart bore towards him. It was the faded flower which he had given to her in the supreme moment of her life.

They had ascended half way towards Turbie when they met a little carriage coming down from the summit. Hitherto there had been no one on the road. In this carriage were seated two gentlemen, one of whom Gladys vaguely remembered to have seen at the Wednesday *matinées* at the club.

Her eagerness to learn any news that there might be induced her to stop her own carriage as that containing the strangers approached. The latter halted when they saw that the ladies wished to speak to them.

It was Mrs. Carmichael alone who was able to address them. To Gladys speech was impossible at that moment.

"Have you heard," said the older lady, "of an accident that has happened somewhere near Turbie this morning?"

"An accident, madam?" replied one of the gentlemen, raising his hat. "I can hardly say. May I ask of what it is that you speak?"

Gladys sat in an agony of impatience, longing to speak ; and yet it seemed to her that no utterance could possibly issue from that parched throat of hers.

"An English gentleman, we understand, has been"—killed, Mrs. Carmichael would have said, but she shrank from using the word in the presence of Gladys, so she said instead—"wounded very severely, not far from Turbie early to-day."

The occupants of the carriage glanced significantly at each other.

"I presume, madam," said the younger of the two, who was the doctor, "that you speak of Monsieur Mansfield."

She assented by a nod.

"Ah, then, madam, I regret to say that what you have heard is true. He has been seriously hurt, and now lies at the inn at Turbie, whither he was carried after the affair."

Gladys half rose in the carriage, and, leaning forward, cried—

"Then he has not been killed; he is living, do you say? Oh, he will not die! Tell me that there is some hope."

"Madam," said the surgeon, gravely, "there is hope, good hope, I would fain believe. Monsieur Mansfield's wounds have been dressed, and he is now left at Turbie in the care of a friend, a compatriot. Let me inform you that I am the doctor who has the honour of attending him; and that it is absolutely necessary for his safety that he should not be disturbed or excited at present."

"But may we not see him?" asked Gladys, to whom it seemed that life and nature, the earth and the heavens, had all changed their aspect since the words that gave the lie to Bessarion had fallen from the lips of this grave stranger.

Mrs. Carmichael grasped the girl's hand, vainly seeking to restrain her impetuosity. A few minutes before she had been ready to dare anything for the sake of Gladys, believing that Rex was dead; but now that she had learned that he still lived, it behoved her to act with prudence.

But Gladys was not to be restrained.

"We are friends of his, monsieur," she continued, addressing the doctor. "Will it not be possible for us to see him? Is there nothing that we can do for him?"

"To-day, nothing, absolutely nothing, madam," said he,

emphatically ; " nothing, save to leave him in peace. Remember, it is the fever which is the chief danger in cases of this description. The fever is certainly coming, and Monsieur Mansfield's condition, already serious, will be very critical. If you are his friends, you may, if you like, make such arrangements as you can with the owner of the house at Turbie for his comfort ; but until I have seen him again, I fear it is my duty to forbid you to see him. I shall visit him early to-morrow ; and if you wish to make inquiries concerning him, here is my card."

The gentlemen bowed politely ; and the two drivers, who had been sitting with stolid, indifferent aspect, not more mindful of the conversation than the wearied horses, cracked their whips and continued their journey in opposite directions. In less than five minutes the carriage containing the doctor had passed in its rapid downward progress completely out of sight of Gladys and her companion.

But that short pause upon the road had wrought something like a miracle in the appearance of the girl. In place of despair there was hope ; in place of death, life ; and let those who know what it is to battle with the arch-enemy ask of their own hearts by what an immeasurable gulf even the faintest ray of hope is separated from that black certainty in which dwells despair.

Yes, all nature was changed by the glad tidings ! A few minutes before she had turned her eyes away from that quiet village in the remote valley which Rex and she had watched together, as they strolled upwards on that never-to-be-forgotten day. It had been hateful to her to think of it still standing there, with all its dull inhabitants pursuing their every-day occupations as though the world still wagged on its usual course, whilst he was gone. But now she looked back with joy upon the place. He had seen it once ; he had spoken to her of its people, and of the little joys and sorrows of their lives, not less to them than those from which the loftiest and most highly cultured of the children of men suffered ; and perchance, he might see it again.

For the time all thought of that obstacle which stood between them, and which forbade all nearness of approach to each other save at the sacrifice of honour, had passed away. He was still in the world with her, a living, breathing man, and that was enough. She felt now that she would be content to be banished from his side for ever, so that she might but watch him from a distance, and draw strength and courage from the consciousness that he was still to be found among the sons of men.

And so at last Turbie was reached. The little village had been somewhat excited by the news of the arrival of the morning, and no one seemed to doubt when this carriage containing the two English ladies was seen speeding towards the inn what was their mission. Sympathetic eyes looked forth from dull faces, and more than one grim and wrinkled hag, painfully engaged in her daily battle with the sordid realities of poverty and care, had a word of pity to murmur as she saw the fair-faced English girl, with the beautiful eyes, go swiftly past her towards the house where lay the man who had seen the sun rise that morning in the strength of his manhood, and over whom now brooded the darkness of the Shadow of Death.

O'Toole, with his warm and sympathetic Irish nature, was quick to recognize the fact that Miss Fane and her friend had a special interest in the wounded man. But he put them quite at their ease by taking the fact for granted, and by refraining from even the faintest appearance of curiosity as to their motives, or the tie that connected them with Mansfield.

The patient, he told them, had been sleeping uneasily for a few minutes at a stretch since recovering from the effects of the chloroform. He was still drowsy, and somewhat inclined to wander; but so far the dreaded fever had not made its appearance.

"And I am sure, ladies, I would be pleased to let you judge for yourselves how he looks, poor man, but for the doctor's orders, which I gave him my word of honour to obey. So ye must just rest satisfied now with the report I have to make ;

and faith ! I think it is not a bad one, all things considered. To me it is a miracle that the poor fellow is alive at all. It was never meant by the other man that he should live to see the sun set to-night."

Whilst Gladys sat with her lovely eyes fixed upon the young Irishman, who blushed whenever he looked at her, and secretly envied Rex the interest she took in his welfare, Mrs. Carmichael devoted herself to the practical work of cross-examining the woman of the house as to the extent of the comforts which it boasted for the use of the wounded man. Very soon she had made out a list of certain things that in her eyes were indispensable in such a case, and which were procurable only at Nice. Armed with this she prepared for the return.

To Gladys the mere fact that she was under the same roof with Rex had brought a soothing sense of peace to which her heart had been a stranger for weeks. She was jealous of the friendly Irishman, who was allowed to look upon his face ; yet it was something to be so close to him, to be allowed to breathe the very air which he inhaled, to be with those who were the actual attendants at his sick bed.

When the tired horses had been put into the carriage again, and she and her friend had taken their seats, she thanked O'Toole with all the graciousness of a princess, leaving the worthy young man slightly overcome—for he was more than ordinarily susceptible even for a gentleman from the county Cork—by so much of beauty and of friendliness.

It was growing dark as they started on their downward journey ; but the bells jangled to a merry tune on the collars of the horses, and no thought of fear lurked in the heart of Gladys, to whom the interview with Bessarion in the morning now seemed like some ghastly nightmare from the spell of which she had been happily released.

Towards daybreak on the following morning Rex woke from a sleep which had lasted for several hours. He was in great pain and very weak, with the fever beginning to manifest itself ; but his mind was for the moment perfectly clear. The

strangeness of his surroundings in that little room, with its rude furniture, its one miserable candle shedding a doubtful light, that seemed to be concentrated upon the worm-eaten crucifix which hung opposite to the bed, bewildered him at first. He could not understand where he was, or why his whole frame was racked with pain, which throbbed through all his nerves without intermission. But slowly the truth came back, and he remembered, not everything, but enough to satisfy his curiosity as to the reason for his present position.

He remembered walking across the grass to the little valley accompanied by O'Toole ; and he had some vague recollection of observing a smile upon the face of Bessarion when the latter received his pistol from the hands of the second. After this his memory was a blank so far as the duel was concerned. There was, indeed, some vague recollection of a dreadful moment when he groaned in his anguish as he was being lifted into the carriage ; though even this was so indistinct that it might have been nothing more than a dream.

But then, as his mind followed as nearly as it could the sequence of events, he remembered something else, something that brought a smile to his face, the ghastly pallor of which bore evidence to the severity of his wound.

In a feeble voice he called upon O'Toole. The latter, who had promised to remain by his friend until a nurse could be procured from Nice, was at his side in an instant, adjuring him not to exhaust his strength by speaking.

Rex feebly signified his willingness to obey ; for he had indeed little power of speech left at that moment. Yet there was one question that he felt he must ask, even if he were never to speak again.

"I thought I heard voices ; I don't know when, but since I came here—the voices of English ladies in the next room. Have any ladies been here, or was it only a dream ?"

"No, me dear boy ; it was no dream, though one of the ladies was so beautiful that she might have been a vision out of heaven. They had heard of the duel, and come straight

up from Nice to inquire after you. But now don't let yourself get excited."

"No," replied Rex, faintly, "I shall not do that."

He closed his eyes, but on his white lips there was something like a smile.





CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW A CERTAIN GAME ENDED.



WHEN Gladys, rushing past Prince Bessarion with her mind torn by agonizing emotions, hastened to tell Mrs. Carmichael of the duel and its result, she left the Prince himself in no enviable mood.

He had seen with a fierce joy the anguish depicted on the girl's face. It was his revenge for the open scorn with which she had treated him, and he relished it keenly. An English gentleman, and, in fact, any Englishman who was not a depraved and hardened ruffian, would never have exulted as Bessarion did at that moment in the pain he had caused to a woman. He might have felt this brutish joy perhaps; but the national conscience would have made him ashamed of it and of himself.

Conscience, however, has different standards in different lands; and to the Roumanian there seemed nothing ignoble in this infliction of keen suffering upon a woman. His handsome face shone with a devilish light as he watched Gladys passing swiftly along the corridor of the hotel with the gait, so it seemed to him, of a wounded fawn. He rejoiced in the force and

precision with which he had struck home when at last all terms of amity between them had become hopeless. He was only sorry that it was not all to come over again. He would have enjoyed seeing her once more lying stunned, stupefied, helpless before him; he would have delighted anew in her slow awaking to misery and in the cry of agony that was wrung from her very heart. It was something to taste revenge so sweet as this had been.

But even as this thought flashed through his mind, Gladys disappeared from his sight, and with her disappearance a change came over his spirit. He felt that she had gone from him now for ever; that the look of unutterable horror with which she had regarded him was the last look he was ever to receive from her eyes. The demoniacal passion in his heart died away; and as he went out of the hotel, and walked along the sunny street, there was a great weight of pain at his heart and a great sadness in his face.

He was profoundly sorry for himself; for he felt that he loved this fiery English girl, with her wondrous beauty and her winning ways, better than he had ever loved any other woman in the world; and he knew that he had lost her.

It is strange, is it not, that even the worst of men should see themselves as victims rather than as villains? Bessarion was not absolutely worthless. Let it be remembered that he had not been trained in any western school of morals. To the Englishman who had just inflicted what might be a mortal injury upon a man, and who had then lied openly to the woman who loved that man for the simple purpose of torturing her, no self-deception would have been possible. He must have known himself for the scoundrel that he was. But to the Roumanian the duel, even though it had been attended by something very like foul play on his part, was a mere matter-of-fact incident in his every-day life; and the revenge he had taken upon Gladys had been the gratification of an impulse which he had never been taught to regard as ignoble.

Perhaps if he felt any remorse at all, as he reviewed his

dealings with Gladys, it concerned the attempt he had made on the previous day to compromise her at Monte Carlo. But here, again, the easy code of his race came to his assistance. That all is fair in love is an axiom which in South-eastern Europe meets with universal acceptance, and receives the most liberal interpretation. As he looked back upon the events of the preceding day, that which annoyed him most was the loss of his money. It had been a large stake which Gladys had thrown away in her despair ; and he was bitter about its loss—all the more bitter because he felt that he had been cheated out of it by the bank. He might have submitted to the sacrifice with equanimity if it had brought Gladys within his reach. As it was, he felt all the inconvenience of the loss, and he cursed the impulse which had made the girl seek this reckless and costly mode of deliverance from the dilemma in which he had placed her.

It was the gloomy aspect of his affairs that was uppermost in his mind as he walked along the Boulevard de la Buffa and into the Avenue de la Gare. His money affairs, he felt, were not prospering, and in connection with them there was one cloud upon his life, the thought of which made him shiver with fright. But, to do him justice, it was the loss of Gladys that troubled him most. For the man lying at the point of death at Turbie, it need hardly be said that he had not a single thought of pity. In his cruelty at least, Prince Bessarion was "thorough."

He turned into the little office of a money-changer under the Colonnade—an office where many men and women come to repair as best they can the ravages which *trente et quarante* and *roulette* have made in their fortunes, and where valuable jewellery is readily accepted in default of other security for the loans which the banker is ready to make.

Bessarion, however, was not apparently reduced to the necessity of parting with any of the costly rings which adorned his fingers. He produced from his pocket-book certain documents which the banker examined cursorily, for he had already done business with the Prince, and knew him apparently well.

"Six thousand louis, Prince!" he said, with some surprise, when he heard the amount required by his customer. "I suppose you are resolved to get back all that the bank owes you? I heard that you had been unfortunate last night and had lost your temper, which is a sad mistake; but of course one forgave you on hearing that there was a lady in the business."

The Prince smiled with perfect self-possession.

"It was unfortunate," he said. "I imagined the young lady knew the rules of the game better than she did; but it was an infamy on the part of the bank to take advantage of her ignorance. But no matter. I shall be equal with them yet."

Then he pocketed the money, all in blue thousand franc notes; and accepting a proffered cigarette from the banker, went on his way smiling. His heart was a little lighter now, seemingly because his pocket was heavier. He would lose no more time, he determined, in getting across the frontier. Monte Carlo for the present must do without him. But there were other places where he could gamble as freely as at Monte Carlo. The fuss about the duel, which might now be expected to begin at any moment, must blow over before he returned to the little Principality; and the sooner he quitted French territory the better.

He was sorry to leave Nice, because he liked it; and doubly sorry to give up the pursuit of Gladys. He had been attracted by her first in London. She happened to be the first English-woman of social position to whom he had ever felt himself drawn, and there had been something about her that had touched him more closely than he was quite willing to confess even to himself.

"*Peste!* these English girls know how to get at one's heart after all," he murmured as he crossed the public garden and turned in the direction of the club. He felt hungry; for he had only broken his fast with a cup of chocolate in the morning, and now it was afternoon, and he had passed through many exciting scenes during the day. It was time for him to eat he thought.

As he emerged from the little garden, he accidentally came into collision with a man who was strolling in the opposite direction. Bessarion felt that the fault was his own. He had been thinking at the moment too deeply about Gladys to notice the approaching stranger. Nevertheless, he turned angrily upon the man, and his anger was increased when he saw that he wore a tweed suit unmistakably English in its cut.

But even as he frowned upon him, a certain sense of perplexity came into his mind. He felt that he knew this stranger by sight; but he was puzzled as to where he had seen him. Was it in London, or in Paris? He rapidly questioned himself, but could get no answer from his memory. Somehow or other the man's face seemed mixed up with many different scenes; with railway stations at which a hurried stoppage for refreshment had been made in the midst of long journeys; with a famous restaurant behind the Opera House at Vienna; even with a little *café* in Bucharest, which Bessarion knew well.

The stranger lifted his hat, and in the stolid English fashion begged pardon in a surly tone; forthwith pursuing his way across the public garden. Bessarion was annoyed at the way in which the man's face haunted him. He could not shake off the impression that he ought to know him, and he was made a little uneasy by the fact that on this occasion his memory had played him false. Then suddenly there flashed upon his mind the renewal of a suspicion that he had been dogged more than once, not here in Nice, but in Paris and Vienna; and by some mysterious process of reasoning, too subtle to be followed in words, he immediately associated this *espionage* with the face of the man he had just met.

He turned quickly to take another look at the stranger. He saw that he was loitering on the broad gravel path, looking up at the trees with an air of innocent interest such as the newly arrived Englishman might be expected to display. The Prince was quick enough, however, to see that his own movements were plainly visible to the other.

He hesitated for a moment. The big Hôtel des Anglais was

close at hand, and he saw that it might be possible to slip into it unobserved. He walked to the door, and made some trivial inquiry of the hall-porter. As he did so, he observed the stranger pass the hotel in the direction of the club-house. It instantly came home to his mind that his suspicions were correct, and that he was being followed and watched.

To any man the sensation of being under *espionage* is the reverse of pleasant; but to Bessarion there was something more than unpleasantness in the position in which he found himself. For the moment he had eluded the observation of the spy. His sudden turn into the Hôtel des Anglais had thrown the man off the scent, and he had thus gained a short breathing-space. But he knew full well that, if his suspicions were correct—and he had little doubt upon that subject—he would very soon be again under observation. The thought was absolutely sickening to him. No man knew better than himself all that close observation of this kind implied in his case.

He ordered some food, and sat down in a corner of the deserted *salle-à-manger* to eat it. Outside, the promenaders were beginning to gather on the walk by the sea, and the band had just struck up a lively strain. He saw many men and women whom he knew. Nice was putting on its usual afternoon aspect. If he could only have believed that the fear which had taken possession of his soul was illusory, he would have been comparatively happy. He tried to compel himself to think that the terrors which agitated him were due to excitement, to disordered nerves, to an empty stomach. Ordinarily the most temperate of men, he now called for a bottle of strong wine, and sought to lay the phantom that pursued him by a powerful draught. But the attempt was useless. Half-hidden by the window curtain, he found himself furtively looking out upon the road, watching eagerly for the reappearance of the spy.

He had not long to wait. The man came back from the direction of the club, a few minutes after Bessarion had seated

himself in the *salle-à-manger*, with a puzzled air. He looked round at the crowd about him with keen eyes. There could be no longer any doubt that he was watching for some one, for some one of whom he had recently lost sight.

Bessarion could hardly swallow his food, so intent was he upon observing the man's movements. Suddenly he turned pale, and almost let the glass which he held at the moment drop from his fingers. The stranger had been accosted by another person whom the Prince recognized immediately as an agent of the French police. The two stood deep in conversation on the footpath. The Frenchman was apparently explaining some matter of importance to the other. Then the Englishman, who had looked startled and pleased at the news he received from his Gallic friend, said something which had the effect of greatly exciting the officer. They both turned quickly, and it seemed to Bessarion that their eyes were fixed upon him, as he gazed at them from behind the folds of the curtain. He could have sworn that they saw him there, and big beads of perspiration formed upon his forehead. He could hardly breathe; but there was a look in his eyes which it was not pleasant to see, and his fingers moved uneasily in the breast of his coat, until they closed firmly upon something which they found there.

It seemed as though the two men had each received unexpected news from the other. They were undecided in their action. For several minutes they stood deep in conversation, and then they moved off in the direction of the club.

Now was the time at which to escape! Bessarion threw a piece of gold to the waiter, and hurried out. The road was clear, so far as he could see. He stepped out into the little garden of the hotel with a bold face, though his heart quaked. To his disgust he saw an old acquaintance of his at the club coming towards him, and so near that it was impossible to ignore him.

"Ah, Bessarion!" cried the man, "I have heard of the affair. You have killed the Englishman, I suppose. Well,

there is no great harm done there. And now, I suppose, you will have no difficulty with *her* !”

He tried to pass on with a hurried word of explanation, as to his being pressed for time ; but the more he attempted to explain, the more stoutly his dull-witted friend insisted upon detaining and questioning him. At last, with his small stock of patience utterly exhausted, he burst from the button-holing bore with an oath, and with rapid steps walked toward his apartments on the Quai du Midi. He dared not look round, for he knew not what mischief might have been wrought during the precious minutes he had wasted in trying to escape from the friend whose soul he consigned with freedom to the lowest abyss of the bottomless pit. He was beginning to breathe more freely, however, and to hope that once more his good star was in the ascendant, when a man came swiftly out of a little side-street, and before he was aware placed a firm hand upon his shoulder ; whilst with the other he tore open his double-breasted coat, and showed a tricoloured sash beneath.

“Prince Bessarion,” said the functionary, “in the name of the law you are my prisoner on the charge of forgery and conspiracy.”

Quick as lightning Bessarion’s hand was thrust into the breast-pocket of his coat ; but before he could withdraw the loaded revolver which was hidden there, another officer had appeared upon the scene ; he was overpowered and disarmed.

It had all passed so quickly that he scarcely knew what had really happened before he found himself alighting at the door of the police-station from the carriage which had conveyed him thither.

For a few minutes only was he detained in a cell, before being taken into the presence of the chief of the police. As soon as he was ushered into the apartment of that functionary, he saw that his instincts had not betrayed him. Standing among a little group of officials was the Englishman he had encountered in the public garden.

“You identify the prisoner, I suppose, Bielski ?” said the

chief when Bessarion's name and address had been duly recorded.

"Certainly, monsieur," said our old friend the detective. "I identify him as the person whom I saw in Bucharest in November last, in the company of the two men named Brocca and Calanis, mentioned in the information before you. I met him this morning in the public garden; and lost sight of him suddenly. I suspect he recognized me, and took shelter in the Hôtel des Anglais."

It was not, of course, for an English detective to give any evidence regarding the doings of the prisoner on French territory. Bielski's work had been accomplished when he had declared Bessarion's identity with the man named in the warrant which had just been executed.

Bessarion saw that the end had come, even before the jovial little banker of the Place Massena, from whom hardly an hour before he had accepted a cigarette, was brought into the room to detail all that he knew as to the financial transactions in which the prisoner had been engaged. It was too soon as yet to say whether the letter of credit on which the six thousand louis had been advanced that morning was a forgery, though little doubt was felt upon the subject. Up to that moment the banker could testify, however, that so far as his own dealings with Bessarion were concerned, he had no cause to complain.

But he was the only man who could report so favourably of him. From the information before him, the official read the testimony of one officer after another, in which the gravest charges were detailed against the wretched man who stood pale and composed in that little group of the agents of the law. The sullen answers which Bessarion gave to the questions put to him by the presiding functionary did him no good. But he was already desperate, and his one hope was that he might secure the means of dying at once. A great criminal conspiracy, into which he had been lured more than a year before, when his excesses at the gambling table had plunged him into

difficulties from which there was no honourable way of escape, had at last been unveiled, and he himself had been exposed as one of the leading and most important agents of the conspirators. It was all over, he felt ; and there was nothing for him to do but to die.

The English detective, with his keen air of intelligence, watched all the proceedings with the satisfaction of one who has achieved victory in a long and difficult struggle. He had no personal animosity toward Bessarion. Nay, he had even a certain amount of respect for him : such as that which inspires the hunting-man when he finds himself in pursuit of a particularly crafty and plucky fox. But there was at the same time all the exultation of the successful Nimrod in his heart, as he thought that he had at last run this daring criminal to earth.

The game, as he had expressed it when talking to Mansfield in Paris, had been such a pretty one, that he almost regretted its conclusion. Never before, in all his varied experiences, had he been the cause of bringing a real Prince to justice. And this Prince had flown so very high ; had consorted with people of so much distinction, had played his part so boldly and so dexterously, that it was impossible not to feel a certain degree of admiration for him.

"Lor ! but he has been a well-plucked one in his time," said Bielski to himself, as he stood watching the formalities of Bessarion's first appearance in a police-office, "and I dare say the poor devil would never have got into this mess if that scoundrel Brocca had not got hold of him when he was pressed by debts of honour. He doesn't look like a thief, that is certain. But that makes him all the more dangerous. That high-bred air and handsome face of his would deceive anybody. Bless me, if I wasn't half taken in by them myself at first. This will be news for Mr. Mansfield. I must look him up now ; and tell him all about it."

He liked Mansfield ; and it is more than probable that he would have regarded Bessarion in a much less kindly spirit if

he had known that at that moment Rex was lying in a wretched inn at Turbie, sick nigh unto death from the wound inflicted upon him by the high-born swindler who had at last been brought to justice.

As it was, he regarded the commanding figure of the Prince as he stood there, in the presence of his accusers, with a certain amount of pity. He knew that it was, as he put it, "all up with him." The French law, when it gets hold of a criminal of this stamp, does not allow him to slip through its fingers ; and this splendid-looking man, who had been the delight of a hundred *salons*, who had played the great game so deftly and so boldly, and had made himself, even when steeped in criminality, the friend of powerful and illustrious persons in many different countries : nay, who had shown himself the master of so bright and fascinating a manner, so nimble an intelligence, was already as good as a convicted felon, doomed to wear out the remainder of his days amid the shame and anguish of a penal establishment.





CHAPTER XXXV.

AFTER TWO MONTHS.



TWO months had passed since the duel, and Nice was now nearly empty. The season at Monte Carlo was now drawing to a close; in another day or two the great rooms of the establishment would be closed, the members of the splendid band would depart to seek engagements elsewhere, the croupiers would retire to enjoy a little respite from the eternal ringing of the changes in *roulette* and *trente et quarante*, and the gamblers, or at least such of them as had survived the campaign of the winter, would have to seek entertainment in some less notorious spot.

In Nice itself the winter visitors were now conspicuous by their absence. They had gone back to Paris or to London or to New York, and most of the fashionable hotels were on the point of closing their doors. New arrivals were rare, and when the big omnibus of the Superb, which had been sent up to the railway station as a sort of forlorn hope, instead of turning into the stable-yard in the rear of the premises, came with much cracking of the driver's whip to the chief entrance to the hotel, proprietor, manager, and porter rushed simultaneously to the

door in order to feast their eyes upon the unwonted spectacle of a stranger.

A lady's-maid was the first to descend from the huge structure; then came a pale and quiet travelling-companion. Next a fine pug was handed forth with care, and finally Mrs. Wybrowe herself, in magnificent array, made her appearance.

She looked round sharply upon the group.

"You have rooms, I suppose?" she said, with something like a chuckle, to the unfortunate proprietor, who stood bowing and rubbing his hands. "I dare say you are not crowded to the doors just now, eh?"

The man admitted that it would be possible to accommodate my lady; a family of distinction had left two days before, and their apartments were at her service.

"Well, well; I don't mind who has had the rooms before so long as they suit me now; but I'm only stopping for a day or two. Nice is as hot as an oven, and all good Christians must be anxious to get away from it as soon as possible."

The landlord acknowledged the perfect propriety of the sentiment, and even went so far as to say that in a week or two the brave flag of the Superb would cease to flutter from the roof.

"Is Miss Fane still here?" demanded Mrs. Wybrowe, as she was being conducted in solemn state to a suite of rooms on the ground floor.

"Ah, yes, madam! Mademoiselle Fane and Madam Carmichael have remained with us all the winter. They are out driving at present."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Wybrowe with something like a growl, "let me know as soon as they come back. There is my card. Give it to Miss Fane when she returns, and tell her I should like to see her at once."

And then the good lady surrendered herself into the hands of her maid. Half an hour later there was a gentle tap at the door, and Gladys made her appearance.

"Upon my word, my dear," was the first utterance of Mrs.

Wybrowe, "I can't congratulate you on your looks. Nice does not agree with you half so well as Paris seemed to do."

The girl was thin and pale ; and her whole bearing was subdued and sad in comparison with the brightness and vivacity which had once distinguished her.

"Oh, please, Mrs. Wybrowe, have a little mercy on me," she responded, with a faint kindling of her old gaiety. "Nice is melancholy enough already, and it is a thousand years at least since anybody thought of paying me a compliment. Could you not oblige me by saying something pretty, just to enable me to recall the sensation of being flattered?"

Gladys was nervous and fluttered. That stay in Nice had made its mark upon her. She felt many years older since she came there, and it was not to be denied that she looked older also.

Mrs. Wybrowe's manner was short and ungracious. Evidently she was not in quite so blithe a mood as that in which we saw her last.

"Oh, you look quite pretty enough still ; though not perhaps so much of a madcap as you used to do. But come here and sit beside me ; for I want to talk seriously to you."

Gladys did as she was told without a word. When seated on the couch she looked painfully thin and worn in comparison with the plump figure and beaming countenance of Mrs. Wybrowe.

That lady took the hand of Gladys in her own.

"Ah," she said, pointing to the bracelet which she herself had given to the girl, "I see you are sticking to the good old motto. My dear," she added in gentler tones, "if all I have heard be true, you stand in need of the comfort and protection which the old saying affords."

Gladys said nothing ; but her head drooped, and there was a look of pain and weariness in her face.

"You don't know how shocked I was when I heard all about this affair, and read about it, too ; for I suppose you know it got into the papers ? I don't blame you, my child,

half so much as I blame that old fool of a father of yours. What does a man mean by leaving his eldest daughter without proper care in such a place as Nice? But if I do not blame you very much, you must know that I do blame you a little. A young lady who gets mixed up with the schemes of swindlers, and about whom men fight duels, and whose name figures in all the newspapers, cannot have behaved altogether as a model of propriety should have done."

"But you know, Mrs. Wybrowe, I never pretended to be a model of propriety," said Gladys, roused to attempt some defence of herself.

"If you had pretended to be anything of the sort, Gladys Fane, you and I would never have been the friends we are," replied the old lady, somewhat inconsequently. "But now I want you to tell me all about it. You have no idea of the shocking stories they told me when I was at Palermo about you and your affairs here. You see, my dear, I was foolish enough to stand up for a certain scatter-brained girl when she quarrelled with her stepmother last year, and of course all the world was anxious to prove to me that I had been a fool to do anything of the sort. First of all, tell me about that Prince of yours, whom you gambled with at Monte Carlo, and who killed the Englishman—I forget whether the man died or not—and was then locked up by the police as a forger."

"Ah, he is not dead: but he has been very, very ill," said Gladys, in gentle tones.

"The Prince? I never heard he was ill. I supposed he was at the galleys by this time."

"I did not mean that man; I meant—Mr. Mansfield."

"Oh, I see!" replied Mrs. Wybrowe, drily. She gave the girl a long, searching look.

"Then it wasn't the Prince who was the hero after all," she said, with a short laugh. "Well, I must say I am glad of that. It was scarcely pleasant to think of an English girl as being in love with a common swindler who had been sentenced to twenty years of hard labour in a French convict prison. But

what about the Englishman? Who is he, or what is he? I hope you know more about him than you did of the Prince."

It was a difficult matter to conceal anything from the twinkling little green eyes of Mrs. Wybrowe. Gladys knew perfectly well what was passing in her mind, as she sat gazing steadily at her. The girl tried to look unembarrassed, but it is to be feared that she was but indifferently successful in the attempt.

"Mr. Mansfield is the gentleman who contested Fanesford at the general election. I believe he is rich; I know him to be a gentleman, and—he is married."

"O—oh! married is he?" said Mrs. Wybrowe. It was difficult to tell whether the tone in which she spoke expressed disappointment or surprise. "Then, of course, I need not suggest anything further with regard to Mr. Mansfield," she added. "But what had a married man to do fighting on your behalf, my dear? I suppose Prince Bessarion was not married as well?"

Then Gladys found herself forced to tell the story of how she had become acquainted with Bessarion, and of that dreadful day at Monte Carlo, with all its consequences. It was no easy tale to tell, especially to so matter-of-fact an auditor as Mrs. Wybrowe. But there was relief in being able to tell it at all. Especially was this the case when she came to speak of what had followed the arrest of Bessarion.

It was not without reason that the girl's face had grown thin and pale during these terrible two months. The arrest of the Prince had been the great sensation in Nice of the past season, and coupled with the story of the duel in which he had been engaged only a few hours before he was seized, it had given to him such notoriety throughout France as few criminals attain. His strange history had been told in every newspaper in the country, and had even spread to England, where men still remembered him as a sojourner in London during the previous season. And wherever the story was told, the name of the young English girl of high birth who had been the cause of the

duel, and who had been Bessarion's companion at the gambling-table on the occasion of his last appearance at Monte Carlo, was hinted at. Nowhere, save perhaps in the European correspondence of some American newspaper, was the name of Gladys given. But enough was said to let all whom it concerned into the secret of her identity. And so the busy tongues of the scandalmongers of society had wagged anew with a story of her doings, a story which completely threw into the shade even the maliciously perverted narrative of her flight from her father's house.

All this Gladys had to tell to Mrs. Wybrowe, and along with it she had to speak of the way in which the news had been received at Fanesford. Mr. Fane, whatever his own feelings might have been upon the subject, had been led by his wife to regard this last offending on his daughter's part as beyond all remedy, and Gladys had practically learned that henceforward she must look upon herself as an outcast, not merely from the society she despised, but from the family whose name she bore.

Mrs. Wybrowe listened with a grave face to the recital. When it was ended, she put her hand affectionately upon the girl's shoulder.

"Well, well, my dear," she said, "it is a bad business; though, perhaps, not worse than I expected when I heard you had left home. What a pity it is that girls are not allowed to choose their own fathers. It seems to me that you have been very badly served by yours. Not, mind you, that I do not think you also have behaved very foolishly. But you must see that for yourself now, I suppose."

Poor Gladys looked the assent she was too proud to express in words.

"What I cannot understand," continued Mrs. Wybrowe "is why you stayed on here where everybody knew you, and they were all talking about you. No doubt it was plucky on your part; but I don't think it was very wise, and I am sure it cannot have been pleasant. By the way," she said, as though a sudden thought had struck her, "what about this Admirable

Crichton of yours, this Mr. Mansfield ; has he been here all the time ? ”

“ No, not all the time,” replied Gladys, blushing. “ He lay at Turbie for four weeks after the duel ; then they brought him down to the Villa Arennes, near Nice, and he has been there until now. He is recovering ; but the bullet has never been extracted, and the doctors do not think that he will ever be as strong again as he used to be.”

“ Is his wife with him ? ” asked Mrs. Wybrowe.

“ No,” said Gladys. She would have given worlds at that moment to have been able to hide her face with its tell-tale crimson flush from her friend.

“ And I suppose that you have been showing your gratitude and remorse, by paying the gentleman all the attentions which he has needed in his condition, and which it was possible for a lady to bestow upon him ? ” continued her pitiless inquisitor.

“ No ; that is not the case,” replied the girl. “ Mrs. Carmichael and I have done what we could ; but Mr. Mansfield is not a man upon whom we could intrude. We have seen comparatively little of him since he became convalescent.”

“ And yet you have stayed in Nice for the sake of being near him ! I know *that* is the real reason why I still find you here. My dear, I am going to take you under my care now in good earnest. This Mrs. Carmichael of yours may be a very amiable and a very honest woman ; but you must forgive me if I tell you that I think her a bit of a fool. I shall take you with me back to Paris when I start ; and it would be a good thing for you if you were to go back to England with me.”

“ Oh, it is impossible, Mrs. Wybrowe,” said Gladys, in dismay. “ I never want to go back to England again ; and I certainly could not do so whilst things remain as they are at Fanesford.”

“ Well, perhaps it *is* too soon to show yourself in London again after all the talk there has been ; though I am sure that would be the wisest course. It would not do, however, if you were to be in London and were not to stay at Wilton Gardens ;

so for the present I shall be satisfied with taking you as far as Paris. It is quite certain," added the plain-spoken old woman, "that the sooner you are out of Nice the better it will be for everybody."

Mrs. Wybrowe was right, and Gladys herself admitted it. She could not have left Nice, whatever might have been the consequences of her remaining, whilst Rex was dangerously ill. But he was now recovering. She had no longer an excuse for lingering near him; and honour and duty alike compelled her to leave him. She had seen little of him during those two months of pain and weakness and mortal sickness through which he had passed. Mrs. Carmichael had visited him constantly, and had supplemented to the best of her power the work of the two Sisters of Mercy who were in constant attendance upon him. But the ministrations of Gladys to his comfort had for the most part been silent and unseen. Once or twice only had she dared to visit him; and then it was difficult to say whether their meeting had given most of pain or pleasure to either of them. There was not a doubt, she felt, either in his heart or in her own, as to the reality of the love which they felt for each other. During those first terrible days, when the life of Rex was trembling in the balance, and when all the probabilities were against his recovery, the girl had proudly and resolutely defied everything, the opinion of the world, her own sense of what was due to conventional decorum, the remonstrances of her friends, for the sake of the love she bore him. He should not go out of the world, she swore to herself, ignorant of the fact that she loved him.

And so the proud, impetuous, untameable heart had made full revelation of itself by that bed-side—not in words, but in that language of love which goes beyond all words—and Rex had learned, whilst he was still fighting with death, that however hardly Fate might deal with him in other matters, it now could never take from him the joy of having been loved by the woman whom he had exalted in his imagination above all the other daughters of Eve.

But Gladys herself could not tell whether the truth, which

she had allowed to speak for itself through her eyes, in the tone of her voice, and in the lingering tenderness of her touch, had done the sick man good. Once or twice, indeed, there came into the white, wasted face upon the pillow such a look of rapture, as his gaze rested upon her, that she herself shrunk from it, humbled and affrighted. It seemed to her as though the glory of the Angel of Death was shining on those pale features, transfiguring them before her ere she lost sight of them for ever. But, for the most part, Rex lay very silent and very sad during those long days of illness; and, more than once, Gladys could hardly resist the belief that her presence caused him pain and embarrassment rather than satisfaction.

All this had happened up in the humble inn at Turbie during the first weeks of his illness, and when all around him the shadows of death seemed to be gathering. But since he had begun to recover, and above all since he had come down to the Villa Arennes, their meetings with each other had been rare and brief. The passionate chivalry of the girl's nature, which had made her resolute in braving everything, even her own womanly pride, for the sake of the man she loved, whilst he was suffering the pains of death on her account, was brought under control again, as he came back to life and to something like strength. She no longer dared to sit beside him, as she had done during the height of the fever; she hardly dared to meet his eyes or to trust her own voice when she answered his. The days at Turbie, now that they were at an end, looked to her to have been the sweetest and most blessed she had ever known, for they had been days in which she had been permitted occasionally to minister to his wants and to hear him speak—to even catch amid his wandering utterances some tender phrase of love, which she might appropriate to herself—some phrase which at least there seemed no one else on the earth to care for. But now all this sweet though painful intercourse was at an end; the realities of life had once more to be faced; and among them the hardest of all was that separation which she herself fully recognized as being alike a duty and a necessity.

So when Mrs. Wybrowe spoke of taking her back to Paris she made no objection. Terrible as the thought of parting from Rex was, it was, she knew, one that must be faced resolutely. All the future seemed dark without him; but she was beginning to realize at last the bitter truth that it is not days of sunshine only which are appointed to men and women in this world; and that the dark grey days, which to the young soul appear to be an outrage upon the order of nature, and the rights of humanity, have to be encountered and endured with such patience and resignation as may be possible. Far indeed had she travelled from the standpoint of the Gladys Fane of old, when this hardest of all the sayings of the Book of Life had been mastered by her.

It was Mrs. Carmichael who took to Rex the news that in a day or two Gladys and she would leave Nice with Mrs. Wybrowe. He heard it with an outward calmness, which was only belied, even to himself, by the sudden acceleration of his pulse, by the fluttering of his heart. He was still very weak, and he knew better than most persons around him, better certainly than Gladys herself did, that he could never again enjoy that perfection of physical strength and vigour in which he had hitherto rejoiced. Bessarion had not killed him, as he meant to do, by that assassin's shot; but he had planted in his frame the seeds of death, and left them ready to spring into fatal activity whenever circumstances chanced to favour their development.

It was altogether a new experience to Rex to have to struggle against sheer physical weakness. There was something hateful to him, something that seemed to war against his sense of the dignity of manhood, in the fact that his nerves were no longer completely under his own control, and that his pulse rose and his heart began to beat furiously whenever anything occurred to excite him.

For all his weakness, however, he was able, as we have seen, to take the news of the approaching departure of Gladys calmly.

"Yes," he said, sadly, and yet with a steady voice, when Mrs. Carmichael had made the announcement, "it is time that you left. The Riviera in May is hardly the place for anybody who does not happen to have had a bullet sent through his lungs, and even I shall have to leave very soon, the doctor tells me."

"Do you go back to England?" asked Mrs. Carmichael, her sympathetic eyes filling with tears as she gazed upon the wreck of the man who had once been "poor Jack's friend."

"The doctors don't think London the best place in the world for me at present," he said, cheerfully. "You see you cannot get a French doctor to believe that the English sky is not enshrouded in fogs all the year round. That London is hot in June, and that you may occasionally catch a glimpse of blue in the heavens, are facts that they have still to master. No; I shall not go to England this year, at all events; and perhaps it is quite as well that I should not do so. A man who has just fought a duel has no right to obtrude himself upon society at home, for has he not violated one of the chief articles of the national creed?"

"Then where will you go? Are you likely to come to Paris?"

"Certainly not to Paris," he said, quickly; almost, as it seemed to Mrs. Carmichael, with something like a shudder. "My present intention is to go to Baden-Baden by easy stages whenever I am able to travel. I telegraphed yesterday for an old servant of mine to come out to me. I should have had him here long ago; but really I have been so much spoiled by the kindness of the good sisters, and of yourself and of—of Miss Fane, in fact, that I have hesitated to place myself in the hands of anybody of the sterner sex. You see, Mrs. Carmichael, how quickly we men are apt to become Sybarites."

He spoke quite calmly; so calmly, indeed, that the nervousness which she had felt when she undertook the duty of announcing their approaching departure to him was completely allayed. He appeared to take it as a mere matter of course.

But when she rose to go, a change passed over his face; and the hollow eyes shone with a strange light.

"Of course I shall see you again before we go," she said, holding his hand ; "and Miss Fane, I know, will wish to say good-bye to you."

He rose from the couch on which he had been lying, and standing before her, gaunt and haggard, looked at her with eyes of pathetic entreaty.

"Mrs. Carmichael," he said, in a low, distinct voice. "I have one great favour to ask of you and of Miss Fane before you leave. I don't know whether I ought to ask it or not ; but all the same, I feel that I *must* ask it, for I think my very life depends upon its being granted. I want you to let me see her before she goes—to see her alone, I mean. I am going down to the Promenade des Anglais to-morrow morning ; the doctor has told me that I may drive down, and try a walk by the sea ; and in any case, if I am not able to walk much, I am to sit there for an hour. Will you ask Miss Fane if she will come and meet me there ? Will you bring her to me ? It will be for the last time, you know ?"

"I shall tell Gladys what you say, Mr. Mansfield ; and I think you know enough of her to feel sure that she will do what you wish if she can."

"Thank you," he said, meekly, almost humbly ; and then he released her hand, which he had retained in his own whilst he had been pleading with her.

If she could have seen him after she had left the room, when, with his white face hidden in his wasted hands, he sat motionless, whilst the great tears flowed from his eyes, Mrs. Carmichael might not have felt so composed as she did when she parted from Rex after that interview. He himself was startled and astonished when those big drops began to fall. They were the first tears he remembered to have shed since childhood, but his weakened nerves and shattered frame were powerless to subdue the emotion which had made itself his master, and for once he gave way altogether to the anguish that possessed his soul.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

ON THE PROMENADE DES ANGLAIS.



AND to-morrow you will have left Nice perhaps never to come back to it. I suppose you will not be sorry to go? But have you never felt how much harder it is for the people who stay behind to bear the pain of separation than it is for those who go away? To-morrow at this time you will be in the railway train flying towards Marseilles and with your thoughts set upon Paris. I like to think of your going, because I know it is the best thing you can do ; because I know you *ought* to go, in short ; but when I think of what bright, beautiful Nice will be without you, I do not find it so easy or so pleasant to face the future."

It was Mansfield who spoke. He was seated beside Gladys in the shade of one of the little bathing establishments which line the shore at certain parts of the Promenade des Anglais. Away in front of them stretched the vast expanse of the ocean, the glittering surface of which only seemed to intensify the heat which the fierce rays of the sun diffused over the whole scene. Mrs. Carmichael was reading at a little distance from them. They were practically alone.

"The future," said Gladys, in low tones, "is something that I imagine nobody likes to face. I have never in my whole life cared to look more than a few weeks ahead ; and now I care to do so less than ever."

Her voice had sunk almost to a whisper. Her eyes sought those of Mansfield, but instantly fell before his searching gaze ; whilst a gentle sigh was breathed from her lips. For a full minute there was silence between them. Gladys raised her eyes again, and looked at Rex. The pale, noble face was turned from her. He seemed to be scanning the distant horizon. She dared not trust herself to look at him. It was not merely that he bore so unmistakably the marks of severe physical suffering ; but that the traces of a mental conflict not less bitter and terrible than that which he had lately waged with death were there, plain for her to see.

Suddenly he turned, and spoke.

"It was very kind of you to come to me here before you went away. I wanted to finish a story I began the day on which we came to Nice. I could not let you go until I had told you everything. Do you remember what I had to say about my first visit to Smyrna? Yes, I think I may take it for granted that you do remember it. May I take up my story at the point at which I left it, just as I entered the courtyard of one of the houses in the city, and saw there two girls, sitting exactly as I had seen them in my vision, or dream, or whatever it may have been, as we sailed up the Gulf?"

She smiled acquiescence—a smile so full of tenderness that it brought a flush of pleasure even to Mansfield's white cheeks.

"They were two sisters ; the daughters of a Greek fruit merchant to whom my friend, the owner of the yacht, had a letter of introduction. They were twins, and so strongly did they resemble each other that I was told afterwards that their own mother could scarcely distinguish between them. When I saw them for the first time they were just sixteen ; but you know how in that part of the world women attain maturity far more quickly than they do in the West. If you had seen

Olga and Maria Calanis at that time you would have taken them for women of twenty. I suppose," Rex continued, in a musing tone, "there have been more beautiful women in the world than these sisters were; but when I saw them, coming fresh to them from a long lonely cruise at sea, I thought them not only the fairest women I had ever seen, but the loveliest and most perfect creatures God ever sent upon the earth. I told you when I first mentioned Smyrna to you that I was what the Scotch call 'fey,' as I sailed up that fatal gulf on my way to the city. It was my destiny that led me to that house where the Calanis girls lived with their father and brother. It was my destiny which made me the slave of the beauty of Olga."

He stopped and looked at Gladys. It seemed to him that a certain tender veil of reserve had been drawn over her lovely face. In very truth it was hardly in the power of woman to hear a confession such as that which Mansfield was now making without being moved to some feeling akin to jealousy. But instantly the cloud was dissipated under Mansfield's glance, and she answered his look with one of proud trust and affection.

"I say I was the slave of Olga's beauty; but to this day I cannot tell whether I was not equally the slave of her sister Maria. From the first I could not distinguish between the two save by the difference of voice. Olga's was sweet and musical in those days, whilst Maria's was shrill and harsh. They were beautiful creatures, who seemed to be wholly innocent of knowledge of the world; and whose simplicity and purity of character I looked upon as almost angelic. Both my friend and I were fascinated; but happily for him he had demands of duty so imperative that he could not resist them. We had meant to stay only one day in Smyrna, and then to continue our voyage to Constantinople, where we were to leave the yacht. My friend stayed three days, and then took himself away unwillingly in response to a renewed and urgent summons from home. He left me behind. You see I could not go. I had no business claims, no family affairs to take me to

England. I had money enough and to spare ; I was young and idle ; and alas ! I was just beginning to eat of the fruit of the tree of life. There was no duty that called so loudly as to compel me to obey the summons, and I saw no reason why I should not remain in Smyrna for a few days longer, instead of hurrying forward with my friend. He tried to induce me to leave with him. I remember how hard he pleaded with me, and how strongly he warned me against the danger of dallying there. And I took his advice in the way in which, I suppose, every boy to whom such advice has been tendered has received it from the beginning of the world down to the present day. I ascribed his apprehensions to his own jealousy. I laughed at the warnings he threw out regarding possible dangers to myself, by which my future career might be injuriously affected ; and I resented hotly the faintest imputation upon the motives of my new friends. It is wonderful, is it not, Miss Fane, with what brilliant audacity boys make light of the wise words spoken by those who have gone a little further than they have in the journey of life ? We travel by a road by which a million wayfarers have passed before us ; and yet we set out by burning the charts and records they have left us of their wanderings, and by studiously ignoring the legacy of experience they have bequeathed to us."

"I am afraid that is a quality not peculiar to young men," said Gladys, with a soft smile.

"Perhaps not ; but at least I can speak for myself. I was completely under a spell in those days at Smyrna. When I look back upon it now I cannot understand it. It is all too wonderful to be comprehended. Love I can understand—a passionate absorbing love into which the whole strength of one's manhood enters. But the sort of frenzy under which I laboured at that crisis of my life—a frenzy which made me willing to sacrifice everything in order to gain what I coveted—seems to me now to have been nothing short of madness. But whether it was really madness, or merely excess of self-indulgence, the result was the same. I fell in love, as I have

said, with both these sisters; but after a while, distinguishing Olga by her voice, I devoted myself specially to her. The old father, whom, in my ignorance of the Levantine character, I looked upon as a model of probity and benevolence, was by no means averse to the young English gentleman as a suitor. He probably exaggerated my means, knowing that I was the friend and companion of a very wealthy man. At all events, he showed a very friendly face to me, and would fain have had me take up my quarters with himself and his family in Smyrna. I had just sufficient strength of mind to resist his pressing invitations to do so. But at last he carried his end in another way. He proposed that I should follow the example of most rich Englishmen, and visit Ephesus. Now-a-days you can go to Ephesus by rail. It was different then, however, and the journey across the trackless country between Smyrna and the ruined city was a long and somewhat dangerous one. We made a summer pic-nic of it. Old Calanis proved himself the most liberal and agreeable of hosts. He was the head of the party; and of course, his daughters accompanied us, and his son. By the way," said Rex, abruptly, breaking off in the midst of his narrative, "you have seen the son."

There instantly flashed upon the memory of Gladys the meeting of Mansfield in the hall of the gambling-house at Monte Carlo with the disreputable stranger by whom she had been insulted at the gaming-table.

"Was he the person who spoke to you on the day when we visited Monte Carlo together?" she asked.

"Yes," said Rex, with an air of rather melancholy cynicism. "That was my distinguished brother-in-law. He did not look like it, did he, that day at Monte Carlo? But when I first knew him the seeds of rascality, which I suppose must have been latent in his character from his very birth, had not developed themselves. He was a smart and extraordinarily acute young man, whose superior knowledge of the world, though he had never been further from Smyrna than Constantinople, and of the weaknesses of mankind, although he

was several years my junior, made a great impression upon me; and even inspired me with a sort of envy. That he was cunning, cruel, avaricious, unscrupulous—that, in short, he possessed all the worst vices of the modern Greek character—was a fact of which I had then not the smallest conception. But to return to my story, which I can make very short now. I must ask you to picture to yourself this little expedition of ours, camping out upon the slope of Mount Prion, the hill which once looked down upon the towers and gates of Ephesus, and in which the Cave of the Seven Sleepers is still pointed out. There was nothing at Ephesus to dispel the glamour which surrounded me in those days. Hardly anywhere in the world—not even at Pompeii itself—is one brought into such close and immediate relationship with that elder world which has been made known to us by history and tradition, as one is at Ephesus. To the visitor to that weird city of the dead, it seems as though all the traditions of the early Christian Church and of pagan Greece were centred upon the spot; and the effect of sojourning at the place where once stood the Temple of Diana, and where still stands the Christian church within the walls of which they say that the mother of Jesus was buried, must be to draw any impressionable young man for the time away from the active life of this bustling century of ours. So far as I was concerned, I seemed to lose my hold upon the West, and upon the place in life to which I had been born. I had dropped into the land of the lotus-eaters, and I found it to be a land where not only nature was kind and women were fair, but where my sense of the romantic was fed by relics that carried one's mind back in an instant for two thousand years or more to that older world which had so little in common with what we call modern civilization; but which yet was swayed, as directly as the world around us is, by those great forces of life which have their origin in the passions and desires, the fears and the dreams, of the human heart."

He had been speaking quickly, and he was out of breath. He paused for a moment to recover himself.

"You see," he continued, with a slight laugh, "I am trying to excuse myself to you, and to make it appear that I was the victim of some strange spell, Satanic or otherwise, whilst I was over there in the East. I should do better, I think, to abandon the attempt, especially now that the East has been vulgarized; and that you go to Ephesus by special train, having taken care to telegraph beforehand to Ayasalook for your luncheon. Come: I won't waste your time or try your patience further, Miss Fane. That night at Ephesus, as we sat in front of our tents beneath the Eastern stars and beside the great fire we had lighted to drive away uncanny thoughts, and as we heard the jackals howling on the hills, and the low murmur of the *Ægean* as it broke upon the shore once lined by the quays and docks of the greatest city in the world, I succumbed to my fate. I asked Olga Calanis to marry me, and she consented to do so."

He stopped, and rose to his feet. Gladys sat looking at him, with pity shining from her eyes. His voice, which hitherto had been perfectly calm, was broken now, and she could see that he was fighting almost fiercely to master his inward agitation.

"Will you take a walk with me?" he said, abruptly. "I cannot go on with my story sitting still in this matter-of-fact fashion. I am strong enough now, you know, to walk a couple of miles at a stretch."

She rose without a word, and went out with him upon the sunny promenade.

"I cannot tell you my life during the time that followed my marriage," he said, after they had walked a few steps. "There are some things in every man's life, I suppose, which can never be revealed to any human eye, however tender or pitiful it may be. My beautiful bride was transformed in six months' time—aye, in less—into a woman who had only two thoughts in the world—the gratification of her own caprice, and the enjoyment of the sensual sloth from which the passing excitement of my appearance upon the scene and of the wedding had roused her. It is said to be unmanly to speak ill of a woman; and

no husband may make complaint of the failings of his wife save in dire necessity. You must imagine—but no, you cannot imagine it; how can you?—all that I suffered. It is beyond telling; it is beyond thought. I found that it would be worse than madness to attempt to bring my wife to England, and I congratulated myself that I had never allowed my marriage to become known to my friends at home. I know now that I made a mistake in hiding it from them, that was hardly less serious in its character than the mistake of the marriage itself was.”

He paused; but Gladys made no response to the last words he had spoken; though it almost seemed that he had expected her to do so. She moved slowly beside him, with downcast eyes.

“There is no reason why I should not tell you what the real character of Dimitri Calanis, my brother-in-law, was. During that first half-year of my married life he robbed me of nearly half my fortune. Whether his sister Olga was cognisant of the cruel and shameful frauds by means of which he tried to strip me of every penny I possessed, I cannot tell. I know that the other sister, Maria, was, and that she abetted him in all he did. The inevitable end came at last. I awoke—not from the dream of love and beauty,” he said in a bitter voice, “for that had been dispelled before the honeymoon was half over; but from the miserable trance which had kept my eyes closed to the realities of my position. I saw myself tied for life to a woman who detested me, who frankly confessed, indeed, that she had never loved me, and whose habits and instincts were such that it was impossible to take her to England, or to make her known to my friends. That was a discovery which I suppose many a man has made in this world; and to which he must just submit with such patience as he may have at his command. But a mistaken choice of a wife does not always involve the additional miseries which attached to it in my case. It is not every man who finds himself compelled to resort to desperate measures in order to escape absolute ruin at the hands of his wife’s family. This was my case, however. I discovered that father and son,

and, possibly, daughters also, were leagued together to make what they could out of the rich Englishman whom a good Providence had brought within their grasp. It was the old story of the pigeon that had taken shelter in the kite's nest, and there was only one way of escape—flight. I was willing to take my wife with me, but she refused to move. So—whether rightly or wrongly, heaven only knows—I made terms with her family, buying from them at a heavy price the right to live apart from them for ever. I was like a man emerging from a hateful charnel-house when I sailed from Smyrna, after completing this arrangement. I went to England only to discover very quickly that I had not got so completely free from the Calanis family as I imagined. I found that the cunning Greek had made himself fully acquainted since my marriage with my private affairs: and that if any improvement were to take place in my fortune, he would insist upon profiting by it. I went to the United States, and stayed there for two years; for there at least I was out of the reach of my brother-in-law. But then came a change in my position which to a certain extent diminished the embarrassment in which my folly had involved me. I received a piteous letter from Dimitri Calanis informing me that a great calamity had overtaken his family. Their country house near Boujah had been attacked by brigands during his absence. His father and his sister Maria, he told me, had been killed, whilst my wife had suffered so terribly from the shock that her reason had given way. I would have returned at once to Smyrna, for though all affection for the woman I had married had long since passed away, I could not shut my eyes to the duty which her misfortune imposed upon me. But before I could cross the Atlantic I had another communication from Calanis to inform me that, carrying out what he believed would be my wish, he had brought his sister to Paris and placed her in a famous *maison de santé* there. She has remained there ever since. Do you remember meeting me in the Avenue de Neuilly one day last autumn, when you were with Mrs. Carmichael?"

Gladys recalled the incident, and understood at once who it was whom Rex had been visiting in the madhouse, from the gate of which she had seen him emerge.

"Do you often see her?" she asked.

"No; I have only seen her once since she was placed under the care of Dr. X——. She is hopelessly insane; and my appearance, they tell me, would only have the effect of making her worse. All her beauty was gone when I saw her on that one occasion; even her figure had changed for the worse, and I should scarcely have recognized her, but for her beautiful hair, which, unlike that of most Greek girls, was light brown in colour, with a gloss like that of satin."

They had reached a part of the promenade beyond the line of big houses and hotels. The broad walk was almost deserted. There was a bench here facing the sea, and shaded from the road by some stunted shrubs. They seated themselves upon it.

"I have told you my story," said Rex, watching the face of Gladys as he spoke. "You are the one living soul to whom I have revealed it. You will understand now how it is that I have never cared to 'improve my chances,' as my friends call it. I have a mad wife in a French lunatic asylum—a woman who enjoys perfect physical health, although she is hopelessly insane, and who, the doctor tells me, may live to be ninety years old, as I believe some ancestors of hers did. I have a brother-in-law who simply lives upon what I pay him; who has already more than once been convicted of fraud; who, I believe, has been compelled to pawn the annuity he receives from me to meet some pressing emergency; and who would be ready to fasten on me afresh, and bring me to open discredit, if I were to make any advance in wealth or position. What can I do but turn aside from any chance of promotion or enrichment that may offer itself to me? My candidature for Fanesford was the sole attempt of my life to escape from the hateful bondage of idleness and uselessness in which I am held; and I should count that a mistake were it not that it proved the means by which I became acquainted with you. Ah!" he

added suddenly, breaking off with something like a cry of pain, "perhaps for that very reason it was the greatest mistake of all my life after the fatal one of my marriage."

"Do not say so," she said, in a low voice. And, urged by an impulse she could not resist, she moved nearer to him as she spoke, her face radiant with tenderness and beauty. Her ungloved hand was lightly laid on his; and in an instant their forms were drawn together, and their lips had met in a pure kiss of love.

It was for a moment only that the irresistible impulse to which they had yielded simultaneously held its sway over them. Rex was the first to recover his self-control. Gently yet firmly he drew himself away from Gladys, whose hands still held his, and rising from the bench where they had been screened from observation by the outer world, he stood before her, pale and passion-driven, but yet striving bravely for the mastery.

"Forgive me!" he said, with manifest agitation; "forgive me for the wrong I have done you now! forgive me for having ever seen you, for having ever spoken to you! Alas! I have brought you nothing but pain and shame."

"You must not speak in that way," said Gladys, gently. Her voice was steady, but the burning blushes that covered her face told their own tale. "I have nothing to forgive. You have always been kind and noble and like yourself in your dealings with me, from that first day at Fanesford, when you passed me in the street, down to this very moment. I could not help loving you," she went on, making full confession of her heart with a proud humility that trampled down all restraints of custom and prudish reticence. "Yes; I am going away; we may never see each other again, but you shall not part from me thinking that I do not care for you. How could I help it? I think," she said, with a bewitching smile, "I must be under the kind of glamour that possessed you at Smyrna. I cared for you almost from our first meeting in Paris; and now that you have told me your sad story, I care for you a thousand times more."

There were no words on Mansfield's lips with which to reply to this confession. He felt burdened, almost overwhelmed, by the sense of his own unworthiness. If he could have spoken, it would have been but to prove the utter insufficiency of words to express the deeper emotions of the heart. But their eyes met, and their hands touched again; and each knew what the other felt.

Slowly they turned and walked along the beautiful promenade towards where, in the distance, they could see the figure of Mrs. Carmichael approaching them. The sea lay like a lake of silver in the sun; the great branches of the palms drooped beneath the sultry rays; a spell of slumber seemed to have been laid upon the world around them.

"I shall never forget this walk," said Rex, lingering in his deep, full voice over each word as he uttered it; "and so long as I live, whenever I think of woman's tenderness, and pity, and purity, and love, I shall recall the Promenade des Anglais at Nice, and you."

He laid special emphasis upon the last word. Gladys answered him with a smile like that of a bride upon the bridegroom on her marriage morning, so full was it of a joyous humility, a frank, unselfish love, a fathomless tenderness. It was that moment upon which Rex dwelt with fondest recollection when, the inexorable hours having fled, the time came which found him alone in Nice.





CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN PARIS AGAIN.



It was with a sad heart that Gladys left Nice on the day after her meeting with Rex on the Promenade des Anglais. As the train for Marseilles glided out of the station she saw Mansfield standing on the platform bareheaded, watching the retreating carriages with wistful eyes. There had been no opportunity

for the interchange of more than a sentence between them at the station, for Mrs. Wybrowe, her companion, her maid, her pug, and her baggage had absorbed the attention of everybody.

"May I write to you?" Rex had said as he held the girl's hand when the moment for parting came; and she had assented to his request with impulsive eagerness.

From her seat by the window she watched the beautiful town with its white walls, its cypress-clad hill, its long curving shores, fade slowly from her view, as the train raced onwards to Marseilles. But it was not distance which finally blotted the fair vision from her eyes. Something else dimmed her sight, and made her turn her head from the inquisitive scrutiny of Mrs. Wybrowe. Her heart was at Nice with Rex, and the pang of separation from him was a thousand times keener even than

she had expected it to be. She seemed to be leaving all the light of her life behind her in that sunny place.

"Do you know, Gladys Fane, that I am inclined to be very angry," said Mrs. Wybrowe suddenly, breaking in upon the long deep reverie of the girl.

It was with some difficulty that Gladys came back from dreamland to the present.

"I am sorry you are angry, Mrs. Wybrowe ; but what makes you so ?" she said, listlessly.

"Oh, there's more than enough to make me angry with you if I choose to give way to it ; but you may thank your stars that although I am an old woman I'm usually a good-tempered one. Do you know that we have been two hours in the train now, and you have not spoken a word to one of us ? You have done nothing but stare out of the window, and cry. Why, even 'King' looks as if he were ashamed of you."

"Ah ! there are some things in heaven and earth that 'King' has not dreamt of. But you must forgive me. I like Nice, and I am sorry to leave it ; only I think you are wrong about my crying. I have been thinking—that is all."

Mrs. Wybrowe laughed. She was not really angry, though she had been irritated by the prolonged silence of her favourite. But she had a grievance against Gladys, a grievance which she had been nursing for several days past, and she was determined to ventilate it.

"Are you aware, young lady," she said, with an air of mock severity, "that I have been living in the same house with you at Nice for nearly a week ?"

Gladys looked surprised at the question, but admitted that Mrs. Wybrowe was right in her statement of the length of her sojourn at the Superb.

"And do you know that during the whole of that time you have never once asked me how Frank was, or what he was doing, or even whether he was alive or dead ? Don't you think that shows something like want of gratitude on your part, to say the least of it ?"

The face of Gladys took a rosier tint. Alas! she felt that Mrs. Wybrowe was justified in reproaching her. During these last days her thoughts had been so completely absorbed in her own affairs that she had forgotten the very existence of Lord Lostwithiel.

"I'm very sorry that I should have been so inattentive," she said; "and I don't wonder you have thought me ungrateful. You must forgive me, dear Mrs. Wybrowe; and tell me all about him now. I suppose you are overjoyed at the thought of seeing him again in London?"

"I am not so sure that I shall see him. I don't know when he is coming home again."

"You do not mean to say that he has been in America ever since last summer?" asked Gladys.

"Yes; he was there all through the winter, and in the last letter I had from him he said that he might perhaps stay another year. He seems to have lost all his liking for England."

Mrs. Wybrowe no longer looked upon Gladys as a desirable wife for her nephew. Much as she liked her, and anxious as she was to prove her friend, she could not shut her eyes to the fact that the girl's latest escapade, however innocent it might have been in reality, was one which was not calculated to improve her social position if she were to marry. A great deal would doubtless be forgiven to a Countess, and as Lady Lostwithiel, Gladys would have been able to defy the calumnies of the scandalmongers of both sexes. But Mrs. Wybrowe, kindly as she felt towards our heroine, had no wish now that her social rehabilitation should be brought about by her marriage with the nephew whom the old lady loved better than anybody else upon the earth. So long as there was no more serious obstacle to such a marriage than the flight of Gladys from home and the vile invention regarding her which had appeared in the society journals, Mrs. Wybrowe would have been delighted to assist in bringing about a marriage between her and Lord Lostwithiel. But matters were changed now. It was impossible to ignore the fact that there was a foundation, however slight it

might be, for the story which represented the girl as having been associated with the now notorious Bessarion. The innocent character of the association did not matter. It was enough that she had been talked about again, and that wherever she might go in the great world, people would remember that there had been a mystery connected with her stay in Nice. There was, however, another reason which weighed even more heavily with Mrs. Wybrowe than the gossip about Gladys and Bessarion. She was no fool, and her eyes had not been shut during the few days she had spent in the same town with Mansfield. That which she had at first merely suspected to be the state of the girl's feelings she now knew as a fact; and it was not for her nephew, she felt, to sue for the hand of a woman whose heart had been bestowed elsewhere.

"Perhaps," said Gladys, thankful to find some subject of conversation that did not bear directly upon the absorbing theme which was uppermost in her own mind, "Lord Lostwithiel does not return to England because he has found some superior attractions in America."

Mrs. Wybrowe gave a significant chuckle.

"The American young ladies are not to be sneezed at by you English girls," she said. "You should read what Frank has told me about them in his letters. Oh, I assure you, he has found himself very popular over there. They do not laugh at him, as some people I know used to do."

"Don't be hard upon me, Mrs. Wybrowe. I am sure you know that nobody could feel more strongly than I do that I used to treat Lord Lostwithiel abominably when I was a girl. He deserves to be popular wherever he goes. There is not a more honest, straightforward, true-hearted fellow in the world."

The praise gratified the old lady. She stretched forth her hand, and patted the fair cheek of Gladys gently.

"Ah, my dear," she murmured, "what a pity it is that you and Frank did not make it up at first. What a world of trouble you would have saved yourself and everybody else if you had only accepted him when he first offered himself!"

"We cannot control these things, Mrs. Wybrowe," responded Gladys shortly. "But I am delighted to think that Lord Lostwithiel is enjoying himself in America, and I hope he may get a good wife soon, either there or at home."

"Oh, Frank could always marry well, if he chose," said Mrs. Wybrowe, objecting to hear her favourite nephew patronized, even by Gladys. "Some young women in England have better taste than others, you know," she added, with a laugh. "But at present I am inclined to think that, if he marries at all, it will be one of the American young ladies he has been telling me about in his letters; and you know American girls are all the rage in England just now."

"Ah, yes," responded Gladys. "I have heard that too often of late from my friend Mrs. Lorrimer to be able to forget the fact."

Paris in the broiling summer weather had no charms for Gladys. She was back again in the Avenue d'Eylau in body; but her spirit was at Nice, with Rex. She would awake early in those days and lie in her little white bed, perfectly still, gazing out upon the sky—not quite so blue here as it was at Nice. And whilst she thus lay motionless her mind took flight in a moment to the south; and she found herself beside Mansfield again. How vividly the whole picture of that scene upon the Promenade des Anglais rose before her eyes as her memory dwelt upon that time, now hallowed by the pains of separation! She could see every line of his face; she could hear each inflection of his deep-toned voice. And all the accessories of the scene—the strong shadows cast by the houses on the path; the lizards which stole swiftly across the road; the listless palm trees, under the shade of which they had loitered, were once more visible to her. Often it seemed to her that this sweet dream was more real than the prosaic reality around her. It was at Nice, in the society of Rex, not here in Paris, under the same roof with Mrs. Carmichael, that she was really living. The things around her were but the painted show; the reality was away yonder, under the southern skies, at the foot of the Ligurian hills.

The little clock upon her mantelpiece kept time for her in a double sense. It marked out all the movements of the man she loved, besides regulating her own daily life. By means of it she followed Rex throughout the day, dreaming of him in his walks, in his meals, during the hours he devoted to study. There was hardly a moment at which he seemed to escape from her jealous oversight of all his movements. Ah, were they ever to meet again, and was this dreary nursing of illusions, in the very vividness of which there was torture, to be replaced by blissful juxtaposition? The thought that they had parted for ever was too terrible in those days to be faced. The conviction that Fate had ordained it would have killed her, she felt. And then as she remembered how, through her own rash yielding to a momentary impulse, she had set in motion the current of events which had led to the duel and to the infliction upon Rex of the pain and suffering which were now his daily lot, she abased herself mentally before him, and cried out in bitterness against the unkind Fate which had interposed itself between them, and made it impossible for her to devote her life to his service.

Mr. Fane came to Paris about this time, quickened by certain words spoken by Mrs. Wybrowe when she returned to England. Father and daughter were not a little embarrassed by their meeting. He, poor man, was pained to see that the bloom of youth was passing from his daughter's face. Beautiful she was, as she had ever been; but there was a shadow upon her countenance that looked like that of the years. It was no longer the bright and sunny face which he remembered in old days; and if the brooding darkness which had hung over it during the months of bitter conflict with Lady Jane had disappeared, the lines of suffering and of sorrow were only too plainly to be seen.

His father's heart yearned over the girl. With all his weakness and his pride, he loved her still; and deeply as he had felt himself humiliated by her life, not only at home but abroad, he longed to take her back to her rightful place. But the vision of Lady Jane was for ever before his eyes. That

admirable lady had intrusted to his care a characteristic letter of good advice for Gladys, and a richly bound copy of a devotional work designed for the use of "impenitent sinners." How the "impenitent sinners" were to be induced to drink of the water which was thus set before them was a problem which the reverend author of the work had not attempted to solve. Nor had it troubled Lady Jane. She had "discharged her duty" when she had placed this precious repository of admonitory texts and terrible examples before the eyes of Gladys, and thereby had absolved her soul. Happy indeed are the beings to whom duty comes in this plain guise!

Gladys took the letter and the book with a faint smile. She was no longer in the fighting mood. Indeed, as she looked back upon her battles with her stepmother, she smiled at the thought that she could ever have felt so deeply as she did the acts and words of that inestimable woman. She had learned something of the realities of life since then; and knew now that there were more bitter drops in the cup of life than any of which Lady Jane had made her taste.

Nevertheless, she had no thought but one of thankfulness at her escape from the bondage in which her father's second marriage had placed her. And though she was compelled to acknowledge in her own heart that Mr. Fane's manner toward her here in Paris was for him singularly gentle and considerate, especially in view of her undoubted offences against him, she had to confess to herself that the gulf between them was not one which could any longer be bridged. Her way in life had led her into a different region from that in which her kinsfolk dwelt, and they must henceforth be strangers to each other, even though their hearts should be animated by nothing but mutual good-will.

So Mr. Fane went back to London after hearing from the lips of Mrs. Carmichael a full and faithful recital of the circumstances which had led to the duel, and to the unhappy imbroglio with Bessarion. If he blamed Gladys, as he unquestionably did, for the rashness which had again involved

her in trouble, he at least kept his censure to himself ; and when he was once more at home in Wilton Gardens, even Lady Jane—who had been prevented by ill-health from accompanying him to Paris—could not extract from him any open condemnation of his child.

She had been nearly a month in the Avenue d'Eylau when a letter came to her from Rex.

“ Hotel Victoria, Baden-Baden.

“How shall I address you ? I am speaking to the woman I love, to the woman who loves me ; and I come to her to say the last sad words of farewell, after which there shall be a silence as of that of death. Surely in such a case a man may put on one side the poor hypocrisy of conventionalism, and speak as he would if he and she were alone with each other in the world !

“My darling, there has not been an hour since I saw you taken from me at Nice when I have not dreamt of you ; there is not in all my heart a thought or a desire which is not yours. You have imagined that I have neglected you because I have not written sooner ? You believed yourself forgotten ? Is it not so ? Ah, if you only knew how by day and by night your image shines before my eyes, glorified by love and sanctified by suffering, you would know better than to accuse me of forgetfulness or neglect. No, my darling ! Let me write it here once, and only once, to stand on record through all the years of life that lie before me, to remain true to the end, as true when my head is white with age as it is to-day—I love you, and only you, and always you. Together or apart, in silence or in speech, in life or in death, my darling, rest assured of that. Such as I am, let me at least feel that I am wholly yours. If ever in the future you should hear of me as doing any small service to my fellow-creatures, take all the credit of it to yourself. If never again any sign of life reaches you from me, count upon me as still wholly and solely yours. Do not dream that time or distance or Fate in any shape whatever can alter

me so far as this love of my heart is concerned. Go your own way in life—marry and be happy and forget me ; but when the years have fled, and the night draws nigh, and old memories are re-awakened, know, then, my darling, that through all the days of silence and of separation, my love has never, for one single hour, been withdrawn from you.

“So much I must say ; for not to say it would be to perjure myself in writing to you. Do not think that it is an easy matter to write these words. If I were but free—oh, if God in His infinite mercy had but saved me from myself in that far-off past !—what joy it would have been to say this ! Ah, my darling, my darling, with what a fearless heart I would have come to you in such a case to tell you something of the love that has filled my very life to overflowing. Nay, I would not have written it, but face to face and hand in hand, with your dear eyes looking into mine, the truth would have been spoken, and all the clouds and shadows would have passed away, and we two would have been one for evermore.

“But now it is all different, and Fate keeps us asunder, making even this confession of my love painful and hard. Yet you shall not be robbed, my darling, of such poor comfort as the knowledge that you did not surrender your heart to me in vain may give you. Honour—not the poor thing the world dignifies by that name, but the pure and noble reality which no man dare despise—drives us apart, so far as all our future life is concerned ; but ere we go from each other, you shall at least see all that is in my heart, read every secret of my soul that concerns you ; and perchance you may find something there to cheer and strengthen you in that which lies before you.

“Ah, dear, do not think that I am unconscious of what you have suffered since you left Nice, when I say that I look forward to the time when the dark grey days through which you are now passing will be at an end, and when there will again be warmth and sunshine in your life. No word, no sign of any kind, has passed between us since we were parted on that bitter day four weeks ago ; but I did not read your heart as we

sat together beside the sea in vain, and no words are needed to tell me that you still think of me as you did then. But time will bring you comfort. Remember what I told you when I last wrote to you. You are young, you are free. Make good use of the years that will soon slip from your grasp ; and when the day comes when you find that you can think of me without pain, and when new shoots of hope and joy are beginning to spring in your heart, believe that in the whole wide world there is no one who will rejoice more to know that your life is not to be rendered barren and profitless, than the man who loves you now, and who will love you none the less then. You will not throw yourself away in self-weariness or despair ; but in God's good time the way of release will be made clear to you, and you will pass out of these shadows into the sunshine of happiness and love.

"There is no need to ask you not then to forget the man with whom Fate brought you into momentary contact, and to whom for a brief season your heart was unawares surrendered. You will forgive me even then—will you not, my darling ?—for the pain I have caused you ; and you will believe that, whatever the future may have in store either for you or for me, I shall account it to the last day of my life a joy to have known you. And, perhaps—who knows?—for, after all, God is merciful and good—in that boundless future, which is as much within His keeping as the present day is, we may meet again, and know each other once more. Ah, who can tell ?

"Good-bye, my darling. I shall leave here very soon ; for, you will be glad to know, I am rapidly growing strong again, and may hope some day perhaps to be as well as I ever was in my life. I have no inclination towards England at present—still less am I drawn towards America. The jar and the bustle of life in the western world, the coldness and self-sufficiency of our European civilization, are out of harmony with my mood at present. So I shall go east again ; but whither I can hardly tell as yet. Perhaps I may go to Greece, perhaps to Egypt ; possibly to Damascus. *Nous verrons.*

"One thing I must add before I close this letter. Did I tell you that my brother-in-law Calanis was mixed up in the great conspiracy in which Prince Bessarion was involved? I suspected it before I left Nice, but have only learnt it as a fact here from an old friend of mine, an English detective named Bielski. Calanis is now a fugitive from justice. But the payment I have made to him ever since I left Smyrna still goes on. It is remitted to him in some mysterious fashion through a banker at Galata. I no longer, however, receive from Calanis himself reports of what is happening in the Avenue de Neuilly. They come to me direct from Dr. X——. They are all to the same effect, 'perfect physical health: absolute vacancy of mind.'

"When I read this letter over, I learn all the poverty of words to express what I feel. No words, alas! can do that. But I know to whom I write; and I know that you understand all that is not set down here. You know, do you not, how I should like to fly to Paris far more swiftly than this letter will do, and to greet you not by these cold written words, but by the warm living speech? Ah, well! perhaps you may have read Clough's 'Poems,' and may know what he says to those who would fain call him back from the painful path of duty—

'Come back, come back!
Back flies the foam; the hoisted flag streams back;
The long smoke wavers on the homeward track;
Back fly with winds things which the winds obey;
The strong ship follows its appointed way.'

Let it never be said of you or of me, my darling, that we were among the weak things which are the sport of the winds. Let us go our several ways in the paths which duty has appointed for us, not ungrateful for the light and joy which have been momentarily shed about our feet, nor unmindful of the fact that at the end of the stormy voyage will come the safe port and the welcome harbour lights.—So farewell! always yours,

"REX MANSFIELD."

She kissed the name where it had been written by him, and

her tears fell fast upon the precious letter, in which he had poured out all his heart, for her sake. He was right. She *did* understand that which was not expressed in words in the letter. She saw how he had put on one side everything save his wish to comfort her in the lonely desolation which now beset her life. He had put aside even that fear of possible misconstruction which has so paralyzing an effect upon a man's tongue or pen when he seeks to give utterance to the deeper emotions of his heart. He had spoken out, as in the presence of God only, and had laid the bare, naked truth before her, with the courage that is begotten only of an unselfish love.

She tried to answer the letter by writing one that should be not less noble. But her thoughts refused to flow. She could not put them with the force and the fulness which he was able to command. Again and again she began the task, only to find that it was one which was beyond her powers. At last she satisfied herself with a brief note :

“ *Paris, Wednesday.*

“ MY OWN LOVE,—Your letter has brought into my heart the sunshine which you said I was still to enjoy. I want no other light or brightness. Do not talk of being forgotten by me, or of any change that can come over my heart. That was the one passage of your letter that I wished blotted out. When I think of what you have had to suffer for my sake, I feel that *nothing* that I could do for you would be sufficient to repay you ; and alas ! I am helpless and powerless, and alone, and you are going away from me, perhaps for ever.

“ Darling, I shall never forget you ; never cease to love you ; and for your sake I shall try to be brave and to bear the burden of life. But oh, when I think of all the days that lie before me, I cannot help wishing that the stormy voyage was over, and that the ‘harbour lights’ you speak of were shining before my eyes. Forgive me for telling you this. I could not help telling *you* how I really felt ; but do not think I shall give way to my sorrow. No ; I shall try to profit by your example, and

though life can never again be to me what it once was, I shall always find joy and strength in the thought that you have loved me.

“Good-bye, my darling ; and may God watch over you !

“Your own,

“GLADYS.”

In sheer despair she forced herself to be content with this ; and when it was written she hurried forth with it to the post-office. It seemed to her that already half her burden of sorrow had been removed by Mansfield's strong words of love.





CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"JUXTAPOSITION, IN SHORT."



ONE day in September, 1877, that is to say, eighteen months after the duel had been fought between Rex Mansfield and Prince Bessarion, and more than twelve months after Gladys returned to Paris, Lord Lostwithiel found himself taking his breakfast in his room at the Hotel Mirabeau. He hardly looked a day older than that first day, now some five years ago, on which we saw him sitting on the balcony of his town house furtively watching the windows of Mr. Fane's residence on the opposite side of the square. He was still as big and florid as ever, and the good-nature that shone from his blue eyes was just as conspicuous now as it had been at any previous period in his life.

Nevertheless he looked a trifle anxious as he played with the dainty omelette which the *chef* of the Mirabeau had prepared for his delectation, and more than once he laid down his fork, and allowed himself to fall into something like a reverie. Perhaps it was this unwonted gravity upon his broad, honest face that produced the impression that although his features

might not have changed with the years, his character had undergone some transformation. Or was it that the rings with which his noble fingers were once laden were now conspicuous by their absence, and that his coat, instead of being a homespun of tremendous pattern, was now a black garment of the most unobjectionable description?

Whatever the cause may have been, it is at least certain that when, by and by, he took his hat and walking stick and strolling down the Rue de la Paix, turned in the direction of the Champs Elysées, he presented as satisfactory a picture of the pattern British gentleman, genial, broad shouldered, devoid of vanity, and well dressed, as the eye need have wished to rest upon.

Those were days of much political excitement in Paris. They were days, indeed, when all over Europe men's minds were deeply engaged upon problems the like of which are not often presented to us in order to puzzle this poor human intelligence of ours. Away in the East the tremendous struggle of the Balkan Peninsula was being waged, and Plevna and the Shipka Pass were familiar names in all our mouths. Here in Paris Marshal MacMahon and the Duc de Broglie, with such aid as they could obtain from gentlemen like M. Fourtou and M. Paul de Cassagnac, were enacting the part which in England is assigned to that time-honoured lady Dame Partington. It is a part which is humorous rather than exasperating in the eyes of Englishmen, filled with a robust confidence in the impregnable character of the rights amid which they have intrenched themselves. But the case is different in France, and there were many shrewd judges who feared that a little extra vigour in the wielding of Mrs. Partington's weapon might bring about a catastrophe of a very serious character.

But Lord Lostwithiel, as he walked quickly across the Place de la Concorde, and began the long ascent to the Arc de Triomphe, was not thinking about the possibility of a *coup d'état*, nor even about the great statesman who at the beginning of this month of September had been carried to his last

resting-place at Père-la-Chaise. His mind was quite otherwise occupied.

"I wonder," he said to himself as he pursued his way, "whether she will be much changed. How beautiful she looked that night when I saw her last! By Jove! those American beauties they talk so much about are nowhere compared with her. But perhaps I shall find her altogether altered. Well, that will not be wonderful, considering all that she has gone through, poor girl! How they have cackled over her, to be sure, since she went away! And even my aunt has very little to say for her now. No matter, I have nothing to do with the miserable busybodies. What can it matter to anybody who really knows Gladys Fane what the foul-tongued gossips outside have to say about her?"

And so his thoughts ran on, ever in the same direction, until he found himself ascending the stair of the house in which dwelt the woman whom he had never forgotten.

And here, though he was ordinarily by no means careful of his outward appearance, it was to be observed that he paused for a moment to satisfy himself that his dress was not likely to disturb the equanimity of Gladys.

"Poor girl!" he said to himself, with a slight smile, "how she used to ridicule those coats I was always wearing then!"

Alas! the smart little maid-servant who opened the door of the apartments had to give him the unwelcome news that Miss Fane was not at home.

"And Mrs. Carmichael?" inquired Lord Lostwithiel.

"*Ah, oui, monsieur! Madame est chez elle,*" responded the domestic blithely.

When Mrs. Carmichael received Lostwithiel's card she was thrown into an unusual state of flurry and perturbation. She was not accustomed to the society of men of title, and had never before received a visit from an earl. Nevertheless when, after two minutes devoted to her toilette, she entered the *salon*, it was not on her part that the most nervousness was shown.

The big, good-tempered, honest-faced man was unmistakably

bashful. When he had bowed very low indeed to the bright little woman, and at her request had seated himself before her, he seemed to be quite incapable of further speech. It was by Mrs. Carmichael that the ice was broken.

"What a pity you should have called whilst Miss Fane is out, Lord Lostwithiel. I know how sorry she will be to miss you. You are one of her old friends, I know; for I have often heard your name from her."

"She is well, I hope?" said Lostwithiel, delighted to find that he had not been quite forgotten by her.

"Yes; I am glad to say that she has been particularly well all this summer. She was run down in health and depressed in spirits last autumn and winter; but this year Paris has agreed with her amazingly. I am sure you will think that she is looking well when you see her."

Lostwithiel bowed his acquiescence in the sentiment.

"I have come," he said presently, speaking with not a little hesitation, "purposely to see her. I left London last night. I am the bearer of a message from her father."

"You have brought no bad news I hope, my lord?" said Mrs. Carmichael, whose fears were at once aroused.

Lostwithiel was evidently embarrassed; and as usual when in that state, the warm pink colour mounted to the roots of his hair.

"It is very sad news I have to bring; and yet I hardly know whether to call it bad news altogether. There are so many things to be considered. Of course you know all about Miss Fane's story; indeed her father told me that you knew. Well——"

But at that moment his sentence was cut short by the appearance of Gladys herself.

She came into the room with a smile upon her face that was full of sweetness; and Lord Lostwithiel, looking at her with a lover's eyes, saw in a moment, with mingled pain and exultation, that she was the same and yet not the same as the Gladys he had known.

There was no disputing the fact that she looked older, much older than when he had seen her last, more than two years ago, in the crowded rooms of Exminster House. There was a subdued air about her that he had never known before. He was touched almost to tears by the pathetic gentleness of the smile with which she greeted him. And yet he saw with joy that the beauty in which he had so often rejoiced in the old days had not been destroyed. Nay, so far from being impaired, it seemed rather to have been heightened and purified, made more radiant and tender, by the changed spirit that possessed her.

She clasped his hand with frank kindness.

"I saw your card on the hall table," she said, "and I came in directly. How kind it is of you to come and see me! It is an age since I saw one of the old faces."

What was it that tied his tongue as he looked at her? Mrs. Carmichael must have seen his embarrassment. She began to tell Gladys how Lord Lostwithiel had arrived but a few moments before, and how he had come specially to see her; and so the conversation was allowed to flow in commonplace channels for two or three minutes, at the close of which Mrs. Carmichael retired.

Lostwithiel's face became very grave when he found himself alone with Gladys.

"You heard what Mrs. Carmichael said. I have come specially to see you, at your father's request. I left London last night."

The tone in which he spoke was almost solemn, and it startled Gladys.

"Ah, you have brought me bad news!" she said, regarding him with something like fear in her face. "What is it? Nothing has happened to my father?"

"No; your father and your sister and Harold are all quite well," was the emphatic reply.

Then the girl knew in a moment what the news was.

"Something has happened to Lady Jane?"

"Yes," he said, very gravely. "It is Lady Jane. You and she were never friends, I know, and probably you feel that you had great reason to complain of the way in which she treated you ; but you will not think of that now, I am sure."

There was no mistaking the meaning of his full, fixed gaze. Gladys looked up into his face for a moment, and then she quickly dropped her eyes.

"She is dead?" she said, almost in a whisper.

"Yes," he replied. "She died quite suddenly two days ago at Fanesford. I was in the house when it happened. I was staying there. She had not been very well lately, but she dined with us the night before. It was very, very sudden," he added solemnly.

"Yes," she said, huskily. She had not realized the news yet. She was in a dream.

"And you have come all the way from Fanesford to Paris to tell me," she added, presently. "It was very kind of you ; but I am sorry you should have put yourself to so much trouble on my account."

"You must not talk about trouble. I was staying in the house, and, of course, when it happened, everything was upset, and I was only in the way there. I asked your father if I could be of service to him. Poor man ! the shock was a very great one for him. You see it was so sudden. I think he was a little bewildered ; but when I suggested that the news should be taken to you he was quite eager for me to come and tell you. Ah, you will find him very much altered."

"Poor papa !" said the girl, gently. "It has not been a very happy life his ; and I fear I have had a great deal to do with his unhappiness."

"Do not say that. Rather let by-gones be by-gones now. There can be no good in dwelling on the past. It is all over now. And poor Lady Jane—you will try and think kindly of her, will you not?"

There was something touching in the eagerness with which he regarded her, in his evident anxiety to secure from her some

conventional expression of sorrow, however meaningless might be the words she uttered.

"Lord Lostwithiel, you think I am better than I am. How can I think kindly of Lady Jane now, when five minutes ago I hated her with all my heart? I cannot pretend to feel what I don't feel. She is dead; but that fact does not undo all the misery and mischief she has caused. She is dead; and I suppose I ought to be sorry for her. Well, I am so far sorry that I should have been glad to die in her place."

She spoke wildly, bitterly, and there was a strange light in her eye. He was shocked and alarmed.

"Ah," she continued, "do not make any mistake. What is that about the iron entering into the soul? It is a text somewhere in the Bible, is it not? Well, when the iron has entered into the soul you cannot heal the pain by a word, or in a moment. I know you are shocked. I know that I ought to put on a face of woe and to profess to feel nothing but sorrow at the fact that Lady Jane is dead. But I am not going to lie in that way. I *cannot* feel sorry; I only feel envious. She has cheated me again. It was *I* who wished to die."

He thought that her mind had been affected by the sudden news. He could have understood open exultation over the tidings on the part of Gladys, deeply as he would have been shocked by it. But this strange mingling of bitterness and despair was as inexplicable as it was terrible to him. He was at his wits' end what to say.

"Can you not forgive her?" he ventured to murmur at length. "It is terrible, you know, not to forgive a person who is dead."

He thought of the narrow, placid face he had seen so recently, clad in the triumphant calm of death. He could not bear that this girl whom he loved should cherish any resentment towards that cold and silent figure.

"Ah, you do not understand," she replied, almost passionately. "You think I am keeping up a feeling of anger against Lady Jane. God knows it is not so. I have ceased long

since to vex myself about her. She belonged to the past, as you say; and I have had cares and trials enough since she passed out of my life to blot her image from my memory. I have tried to forget her; and I had all but succeeded. And now you come to me and say, 'Forgive her, and weep over her;' and all because of what? Because Fate has been kind to her, and has taken her out of this miserable world. No: I cannot pretend to be sorry yet. Perhaps I shall be some day, but not now."

She was distraught with excitement or with grief, he thought. There was no good in continuing the interview. He would come back again when she was calmer; and so, perplexed and sorry, he went away, and spent a moody, miserable day in wandering on the boulevards and in searching some of the old book-shops in the neighbourhood of the Luxembourg.

But Gladys, when she was left by herself, retired to her own room and threw herself on her bed; and thought all those long, long thoughts that fill the mind of one to whom the vista of a past life is suddenly opened up. She recalled her early days at home—the happy, heedless days which had gone from her for ever—and the wild days of self-willed recklessness that had succeeded them. She saw herself once more clinging to her father in his room at Fanesford, imploring him not to marry Lady Jane. She reviewed in rapid succession the many bitter quarrels which had been waged between herself and her stepmother whilst they dwelt together under the same roof. She saw again that bright summer morning on which she had quitted her father's house; and then in a moment her mind passed away from all these things, and the picture which presented itself before her had nothing to do with England or with Fanesford or with Lady Jane. It was a man, pale and gaunt, who was standing bareheaded on the platform of a railway station, gazing with yearning eyes after the carriage which bore from him the woman he loved.

"Oh, shall I never see him again!" she cried to herself, in an agony of despair. "Is it possible that life is always to be

for me what it is now ! My darling, my darling, where are you ?"

Lord Lostwithiel did not go back to the Avenue d'Eylau till the second day after his first visit. He found Gladys calm and composed ; and quite ready to talk to him about her father, her sister, and even about Lady Jane.

There was no bitterness in her speech now when she referred to her stepmother. The passion which had distressed him on the occasion of his first visit was gone. In its place there was that subdued air of quiet resignation which had touched him so much when he first saw her in the presence of Mrs. Carmichael.

A letter came to her from her father, giving full details of the calamity that had fallen upon the house, and particulars of the funeral, which was to be one of much ceremonial and splendour. The letter was friendly in tone, and here and there Gladys could detect by the turn of a phrase that her father was thinking of her in the old fashion ; but the pressure of the dead hand was still upon him. He had manifestly not realized as yet the fact that there was no longer any need to consult the wishes of Lady Jane, or to fear her resentment if those wishes should be disregarded.

Upon one point father and daughter agreed in silence. There was no mention between them of any return of Gladys to her old home. Mr. Fane, indeed, was already contemplating such a return ; but it must be confessed that even now, when it was nothing more than a remote possibility, he did so with some trepidation. Gladys was no longer the first in his affection. He was painfully conscious of the fact that they had drifted apart from each other during the years of her exile, and that probably if they were to be brought together again in their old relationship it would be productive of little comfort for either of them. Besides, for the present, the return of his daughter to her home would be so marked a reflection upon the memory of his dead wife that the world would be certain to regard it with disapproval. This of itself, it need hardly be

said, was enough to prevent his making the proposal to his child.

As for Gladys, she was more than content to live apart from those whose name she bore. Sometimes, it is true, she thought with a longing heart of the Fanesford woods, where she had made merry as a child. But the gulf which cut her off from those days was impassable. Besides, there was another reason that made her cling to Paris. It was here that Rex and she had been brought together ; it was here that he must picture her as dwelling—if he ever cared to think of her at all.

Ah, that "if"! For more than a year there had been between these two that silence as of the grave of which he had spoken in his letter to her. No word, no sign of any kind had reached her, save at Christmas. There had come to her then, through the agency of one of the business houses in Paris, one of the richly embroidered silks of Broussa ; and along with it a card bearing his initials, and a simple message of good-will and remembrance.

That was all. There had been no address, no possibility of thanking him. He was far away ; and there was silence between them.

It was not in the nature of such a woman as this to be insensible to this burden of distance and silence. Her heart still clung to Rex ; her memory still strove fondly to recall the very tones of his voice, the exact expression of his face when he had spoken to her in that sacred moment when they sat side by side upon the Promenade des Anglais at Nice ; she still loved him, and revered him beyond all the other sons of men. But alas ! his voice seemed faint, his figure dim, as she strove thus to bring them back. It was the image of a glorified saint, purified from all earthly dross, removed far beyond the reach of human passion, that now shone before her eyes when she thought of him. The warm human nature of the girl, in whose veins the fulness of life still dwelt, cried out with a painful sense of hunger as she strove to sustain herself upon the memory of this bright vision, that had come so suddenly into

her darkened life and stolen so swiftly away, leaving it darker than before.

Was it surprising that just at this juncture Lord Lostwithiel should have developed a sudden interest in French politics? The crisis was a serious one; and there was quite enough in it to make it worthy of being studied on the spot by any man interested in the evolution of a great political problem. So Lord Lostwithiel settled himself for a season at the Hotel Mirabeau, and went about in search of information, sitting for long tedious hours awaiting the arrival of the unpunctual orators who were addressing the electors of each particular *arrondissement*, and by great good luck succeeding in procuring admission to the American Circus, in which the hero of the struggle, M. Gambetta himself, raised that shrill note of defiance against the usurpers to which all France responded at the ballot-box as to the call of the trumpet. Yes, there was enough and more than enough here to interest any man of common intelligence, who was not wholly devoid of the political instinct.

But when the great battle was over, and the popular victory secured, and when men no longer went to bed in fear of a possible *coup d'état* being executed before morning, Lord Lostwithiel still lingered on. And day by day his visits to the Avenue d'Eylau became longer. Gladys hardly welcomed them in the first instance; but she could not refuse to receive the man who had come to her as a messenger from her father, and to whose genuine goodness and kindliness she was by no means blind.

So it came to pass that more than once she and Mrs. Carmichael found themselves at one or other of the theatres in the Earl's company; and he was assiduous in his attendance upon them in their daily walks in the Bois de Boulogne or on the bustling boulevards. She found that his American experiences had quickened his intelligence without dulling his good-nature. He was, indeed, everything that a temporary companion ought to be; and, though she never dreamt for one

moment of putting him in comparison with the man whose image was enshrined in her heart, she nevertheless grew to rely upon the doglike faithfulness and modesty of her old friend, and even to find a certain degree of pleasure in his society.

He was not a deeply read person, though he had a fancy for collecting old books, and it is probable the very names of the poets whose writings were perfectly familiar to Mansfield were unknown to him. But from the manner in which he followed the footsteps of Gladys whithersoever she went, it might have seemed that he had not studied in vain certain lines written by one of Mansfield's favourite poets, descriptive of the reason which has led a young man to fall in love with a chance travelling acquaintance :—

‘ Well, I know there are thousands as pretty and hundreds as pleasant,
Girls by the dozen as good, and girls in abundance with polish
Higher and manners more perfect, than Susan or Mary Trevellyn.
Well, I know, after all, it is only juxta-position,—
Juxtaposition, in short ; and what is juxtaposition ? ’

He appeared to trust to the effect of his own nearness to Gladys. He knew that he was not the ideal man upon whom her youthful fancy had presumably been set. But he was shrewd enough to know that young ladies who have passed the first flush of youth are sometimes not unwilling to adapt themselves to circumstances, and to put up with something that falls far short of the standard of perfection to which they clung in their days of romance : and he was very much in love with her, more than he had ever been before, in fact ; and here, in Paris, there were no rivals to come in his way ; so he hoped that sooner or later his fidelity and patience might produce some impression upon her ; he trusted to juxtaposition, in short. “ And what is juxtaposition ” do you ask with the poet ? Juxtaposition is oftentimes mightier than love or hatred, or passion or ambition, in moulding the fate of men and women.

And so winter advanced ; and with the exception of one or two flying visits to England to settle matters of business, Lord Lostwithiel remained in Paris, living in an ordinary hotel, and

frequenting a fifth floor in the Avenue d'Eylau, and finding himself perfectly happy with his position, and not altogether hopeless as to his prospects.

That which Gladys liked about him was his absolute disregard for all the tittle-tattle and scandal which had been heaped upon her name ; the proud confidence in her nobleness and purity which set on one side, as beneath even his passing notice, all that had been strange or wayward in her past life. It was not, of course, the episode of her flight from home that she thought of when she thus reflected on his conduct ; for with the truth about that he was fully acquainted. But she knew that he must have heard from Mrs. Wybrowe of the duel and of Bessarion and Rex. None but a man of generous soul, she felt, would have been willing to preserve so absolute a silence as that which Lostwithiel kept upon these topics.





CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN ENGLISH SAINT.



QUAINT and polyglottic company it was which was assembled on the evening of one April day in 1878 in the dining-room of the Pera Club. The war was at an end ; and yet there was still thunder in the air, and no man knew how soon the Lion and the Bear might be locked in a death-struggle for that splendid prize which sits throned on the Bosphorus. Here in the club, however, there were no traces of the general anxiety which prevailed in political circles throughout Europe. The merchants and shipping agents of Galata, the lawyers who plied their calling under the shadow of the Mosque of St. Sophia, the soldiers of fortune of every nationality, the Greek bankers, and the English newspaper correspondents, who were dining or smoking or talking in the ill-ventilated room, were more intent upon the mere gossip of the day than upon any of those affairs of high policy which attracted the attention of the outer world.

What a babel of tongues saluted the ears of the new-comer as he entered the crowded apartment, and how heavy and dis-

agreeable was the atmosphere, thick with the fumes of a hundred cigarettes and half a hundred dinners !

"Upon my word, Rex, this gets worse and worse. I don't know how you manage to stand it, old boy, with that damaged lung of yours. There : it has set you on coughing already ! I wish to goodness we were at home, and sitting down to the *table d'hôte* at the Savile."

It was Arthur Ponsford who was the speaker—Arthur Ponsford no longer the warbler of revolutionary odes, and more or less erotic triolets, but a man who had made his name during the recent struggle in the Balkan Peninsula as at once one of the most daring and one of the most brilliant of war correspondents—a very different Arthur Ponsford indeed from the man whom we met at Fanesford four years ago.

"My dear Ponsford, one gets used to everything in time—even to having a bullet in one's body, and to the atmosphere of the Pera Club."

Mansfield was wan and thin, and the healthy colour of his face had disappeared. The grey hairs now predominated over the brown, and even the thick moustache was beginning to be streaked with white. Yet there was a striking air of repose in the expression of his face, and the quick, grey eyes had not altogether lost their humorous twinkle. Fate, it was evident, might be hard upon this man, and yet it lacked the power to break the proud spirit that inspired him.

"Let me see," he said, looking round at the little tables, "the question is where we are to sit, and with whom we are to have the privilege of dining. Ah, there are two chairs over there opposite to Barrow. We cannot do better than join him."

"Why, Mansfield," cried Barrow, one of the English lawyers resident at Constantinople, "I thought you were going off to Athens. As you haven't gone, come down and spend Sunday with us at Prinkipo. It is our first day at the island, and Mrs. Barrow will be delighted to see you."

"Thanks ; but I'm afraid I must decline. I meant to start for Athens yesterday ; but the doctor has come in the way

again. That cold I caught when I rode out to the lines with Ponsford in January still sticks to me, and my medical man won't let me travel at present."

"Oh, don't blame your ride with me for your cold, Rex. You know better than to suppose he caught it in my company, don't you, Barrow? It was that awful week of the scare that knocked him over; I mean when he was looking after the refugees. I wish to goodness he had remembered the fact that one Mansfield is worth a gross of Roumelian women and children."

"Don't talk nonsense, Arthur. Keep your philosophic ramblings for Sunday evenings at the Cycle," said Mansfield.

"Ah, the Cycle! What an age it seems since one smoked a churchwarden there! Oh, when I go back to the Cycle, I know quite well what will happen. 'Ponsford, you back again!' Jack Haviland will say. 'Thought you were dead, upon my honour. But where have you left old Mansfield? Why the deuce have you come home without him?' And then shall I not have a pretty story to tell about the adventures of this nineteenth-century Ulysses! Why, do you know, Barrow, that as we came across the bridge this morning a woman suddenly darted in front of us, and falling on her knees before Mansfield, began to kiss his hand, and to jabber something unintelligible in Turkish, whilst she held aloft a particularly skinny and ill-favoured baby."

"I suppose she was one of the refugees?" said Barrow.

"Yes, I have heard that Mansfield is quite a hero in their eyes. They say that the Greek refugees have dubbed him 'the English saint.'"

"Ah; what a joke for the Cycle!" cried Ponsford; and yet there was nothing cynical in the expression of his face as he looked at Mansfield.

"Oh, I say, you fellows, have the kindness to stop that talk. Come, Ponsford; I must fill your mouth with something, if it is only to keep your tongue still. What do you say to a bottle of Piper?"

"By all means," replied the eminent correspondent of the *Daily Beacon*; and as by this time the soup had arrived, there was a momentary lull in the conversation.

Dinner was at an end, and the inevitable coffee and cigarettes were being enjoyed, when one of the club servants entered with a big blue envelope, which he placed in the hands of Rex, who opened it.

"What is the matter, Mansfield?" asked Ponsford, "you don't look well. I hope you have got no bad news."

"Well, it is news which will make it necessary for me to start to-morrow morning for Smyrna."

"My dear fellow! you know what the doctor says about your condition. You must not think of such a thing."

"My dear Ponsford, do I look like a man who spends his life in fear of the doctor? You should know me better by this time. It was all very well to put off a mere pleasure trip to Athens because he looked glum when I spoke of it; but this happens to be a different matter, and whatever my esteemed medical adviser may say to the contrary, go I must."

Ponsford shrugged his shoulders. "I know from of old the folly of trying to alter your mind when you have once made it up. I only hope you won't have reason to regret your stubbornness."

This was the telegraphic message from Smyrna which that blue envelope contained:

"Dimitri Calanis dying here in prison. Insists upon seeing you. Come at once. Most important."

Mansfield went out into the hall of the club, where the announcements of the sailings of the steamers which keep Constantinople in communication with the outer world were posted. Ponsford and Barrow followed him.

"Ah, this is lucky," he said. "The Messageries boat leaves to-morrow morning. I shall reach Smyrna in good time on Thursday."

Then he despatched a telegram to the acquaintance—an English merchant—from whom he had received the message

about Calanis ; and soon afterwards he said good-bye to his friends and strolled up the ill-paved Grande Rue of Pera to his rooms, hard by the English Embassy.

It was with strangely mixed feelings that he found himself sitting on the hurricane deck of the great steamer, as she clove her way through the waters of the beautiful gulf, and swiftly drew near to the white walls and towers of Smyrna. He had never sailed up this gulf since that fatal day the story of which he had told to Gladys. What years, nay, what cycles of years, seemed to separate him from that far-off time ! He was a boy then ; with his heart filled with all the high hopes, the assured self-confidence of youth. How bright all the world had looked to him then, how free from shadow of pain or care life had seemed to be ! And now !

What was there in common between that lad who had rushed unthinkingly upon his fate, and the spent and broken man, bankrupt of hope, and with but one bright memory in his heart to cheer him, who returned now to the spot where he had met his doom and marred his destiny ?

Somehow or other the beating of the screw, as the stately vessel moved onwards through the placid blue waters, seemed to him to keep time to a song of which he had once been very fond :—

“ When all the world is young, lad,
And all the trees are green ;
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen ;
Then hey for boot and horse, lad,
And round the world away ;
Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog his day.

When all the world is old, lad,
And all the trees are brown ;
And all the sport is stale, lad,
And all the wheels run down :
Creep home and take your place there,
The spent and maimed among ;
God grant you find one face there
You loved when you were young.”

Alas ! where was the door of home which was open to him ?

And as for the loved face, where was it? and to whom were its smiles now given?

He loved her still, as truly and as fully as he had loved her on that day when they had sat side by side, with the blue Mediterranean breaking at their feet, on the shore at Nice. To the love of this strong, manly heart time and distance could bring no change. It seemed but as yesterday that he had seen her last, and her image was as vivid and real in his memory now as it had been on the morrow of their parting. There was not a thought, or a wish, or an impulse by which his soul was stirred, which did not belong to her. Yet he was wise with the wisdom gathered in the thorny ways of life; and he knew that whilst he had thus been faithful to his promise, there were a hundred chances to one against the maintenance of a like fidelity on the part of Gladys. Youth and freedom were on her side, and the sorrows of her heart might surely be healed some day. Yes; she might even now be rejoicing in another's love, and hand in hand with some one who was a stranger to him; might be entering into "that new world which is the-old." Well, even then, he would love her and bless her with all his heart.

And now the screw ceased to beat, and the great ship swung slowly with the current; and there was a mighty rattling of chains, and she was at anchor in the Bay of Smyrna.

Rex had no eyes for all the quaint picturesqueness of that beautiful harbour. The grave-faced turbaned Turks who were squatting on the quay, the long strings of splendid camels laden with bales of carpets or tobacco that moved in stately procession by the shore; the bare-headed, black-haired Greek girls who strolled past with flashing eyes, were all sights familiar to him—alas! too familiar.

A little carriage was waiting for him, and in it he was carried through the narrow streets of the city to the place of business of his friend.

"You are in time," said the latter when they met; "but he is very ill."

Then Rex heard how it was that Calanis lay now in the hands of the police in his native city. After the arrest of Bessarion and the breaking up of the great conspiracy against the bankers, Calanis had fled. Where he had spent the two years which had passed since then was only known to himself and to some confederate through whom he had received the allowance which Mansfield had continued to pay him. Little more than a week before the time at which Rex returned to Smyrna, Calanis had been discovered there in disguise. The discovery had been made in the disreputable quarter of Caravan Bridge. He had been denounced by some man with whom he had quarrelled, and the police of Smyrna had for once been induced to act, inspired, however, not by their zeal in the cause of law and order, but by their hope of obtaining the reward which had been offered for the capture of Calanis. The wretched fugitive had resisted, had even attempted to escape after he had fallen into the hands of the agents of the law; and there had been a struggle, in the course of which he had been mortally wounded.

This was the story which Rex heard from the lips of the English merchant who had summoned him to Smyrna, and who had known him during his ill-starred residence in the city nearly twenty years before.

"When Calanis knew he was dying," said the merchant, "he sent for me, and said that I must discover you and get you to come here at once at all hazards. It was lucky that your old banker at Galata knew your address, and that you were so near. I imagine that if you had delayed another day you would have been too late."

"Let me go to him at once," said Rex.

But Mr. Lambert, the merchant, would not permit of this.

"No," he said, "you must have dinner first. Forgive me for saying so; but I don't think you look very fit for an interview with a dying criminal in prison in the best of circumstances; and it would be madness to think of entering such a place before you have broken your fast. The prison reeks

with typhus, and it would be something like suicide if you were not to take due precautions before entering it. Indeed, if I did not feel sure that Calanis had something of great importance to communicate to you I should try to prevent your seeing him even now."

It was nearly midnight when, the necessary formalities having been complied with, Rex was admitted to the narrow and loathsome cell in which the dying man lay gasping out his life.

A bribe to one of the keepers of the prison procured for the sufferer such relief and aid as the free administration of brandy could afford him.

When Rex drew near the wretched pallet on which the man with whom he had been so fatally connected lay, he could hardly help recoiling for a moment from the frightful spectacle. But he recovered himself quickly. "After all," he thought, "it was not the fault of Calanis that I married his sister," and then he went forward and took the man's hand in his own.

The Greek looked furtively out of the brilliant eyes which flashed so strangely in the light of the little oil lamp that burned in the cell. Then he tried to kiss the hand of the other; but he did not speak.

"You wanted to see me, Calanis. I have come at your request. What is it that you wish me to do for you?"

It was characteristic of the man that he should ask this question at the very outset of the interview. Indeed, to learn how he could help others had for many years past been the knowledge chiefly sought by Mansfield.

"Yes," replied the dying captive, feebly, "I sent for you. Yes; there is something I want to ask you to do for me, but not yet, not yet."

The cold sweat drops were gathering on his brow. Mansfield, who during the recent war had seen much service with the sick and wounded, wiped the clammy forehead, and adjusted the miserable pillow upon which the head rested.

"Ah, Monsieur Rex, you were always too kind," said Calanis, with a deprecating smile. "Yes, it was a misfortune to you that

you came among us when you did. Who knows? Perhaps if you had never seen Olga, if you had never come to Smyrna, you might have been far more happy and prosperous than you have been."

Rex made no reply, but the firmly compressed lips and the pallor of his own face showed that he was not insensible to what the other man was saying.

"She was beautiful, was she not, the poor little Olga?" continued Calanis. "Ah, I sometimes think that you and she might have got on better if you had been left to yourselves. It was a mistake, was it not, keeping you here after you were married? perhaps if you had taken her away she might have learned the ways of an Englishman's wife; and God knows she was beautiful enough for any man to be proud of her. But the good papa did not wish to part with her. Nor did he wish to part with you, Monsieur Rex. Oh, he was cunning enough. You thought perhaps that it was I alone who profited by your good-nature and simplicity in those days. That was a mistake. The good papa loved his children too well not to join them in their enterprises. Ah, no; it was not even the lion's share that fell to my lot."

Mansfield was loth to interrupt these rambling utterances of the dying man. They pained him, it is true; but not as they might once have done. He was past the power of feeling the keen pangs which reminiscences of this kind had formerly inflicted upon him. But it was clear that there was little time to be lost, and that if the man were to make any confession or to prefer any request before he died, he must not be permitted to waste his strength in these vague and purposeless wanderings.

"See here! Calanis," he said, in the deep, grave voice which seemed to come from the speaker's very heart; "you are very, very ill. I suppose you know that your time is short now. I brought a priest of your church with me when I came here, and he is waiting outside at this moment. You must see him very soon, if you wish to see him at all. Well, I have come here, because you wished to ask me to do something for you."

Is that not so? Would it not be well, then, that you told me what it was, and thus put your mind at rest?"

A great look of fear and anguish came into the man's face on which the dews of death were now fast gathering. His eyes rolled wildly, and his wasted fingers clutched at the filthy coverlet of his bed.

"Merciful God!" he cried with something like a faint shriek, "how can I ask it? He will never forgive me! never, never!"

"You wish me to forgive you," said Rex, who was quick to read the working of the other's mind. "Is that not so? Surely you do not doubt that I have forgiven you long ago!"

"Ah, but you do not know, you do not know!" screamed Calanis, half raising himself from his bed in his agony of mind.

"No matter what I do not know, Dimitri, I forgive you everything; see, here is my hand upon it."

But the dying man thrust back the proffered hand.

"No; no!" he said in a whisper, the horror of which was greater than that of the shriek which had burst from his throat a moment before. He signed for some brandy to be given to him, and Mansfield held the cup to his blackened lips.

"No," he continued, in the same dreadful whisper, when he had drunk the contents of the vessel, "it must be told. There is no one living knows the secret but myself, and I dare not die with it upon my soul."

"The secret!" said Rex, moved and startled. "What is it?"

"You thought that she had not died! You have believed all these years that she was alive, have you not? And you have paid me, yes, you have paid me handsomely all this time for having her kept and looked after in Paris. But it is not true; it is not true."

He paused in his speech, and seemed to be clutching at some phantom object in the air. Already he appeared to be upon the point of death.

"In the name of the God whom we both fear, and before whom you must so soon stand, tell me what you mean?" said Rex.

His own face was hardly less ghastly than that of the dying man ; but the light which blazed in his eyes was new light, such as had not been there for many a weary year.

"It was Olga, not Maria, who was killed at Boujah by the brigands."

"And your sister in Paris is not my wife?"

"No ; your wife has been dead these sixteen years," said Calanis, in a thick whisper.

Rex sprang to his feet like one electrified. He pressed his hands across his eyes, as though to shut out the hateful vision of all those years of pain and misery and degradation that lay behind him—the years which had been poisoned by the lie of yonder dying wretch. And then the brave man, usually so unemotional, so full of the inborn self-reserve of his race, threw his arms with a wild gesture towards the ceiling of the little cell, and cried in a voice such as had never issued from his lips before, "O God ! how wonderful !" And then in an instant there rushed upon his mind the full consciousness of the hideous wrong that had been inflicted upon him by the base and worthless creature who lay there, with eyes wide open and parted lips, watching him in terror, whilst the sweats of death gathered on his brow. Yes ; he was free. But he had been free through all these years ; and it was only by the lie of this monster of cruelty and depravity that he had been held in that hideous bondage which had made life a long misery to him. Free !—but he had been free two years before in Nice ; and but for this lie, the one woman whom he loved might at this moment have been clasped to his heart, in the happy English home of which he had been so foully robbed and defrauded.

It was more than he could bear to think of. He sank upon the one chair which the cell contained trembling from head to foot, and torn by such a conflict of passion and self-pity as but seldom comes to any of the sons of men in their passage from the cradle to the grave. And he wept ! Yes, once more he found the strange hot tears flowing from his eyes, and his breast convulsed by the sobs that were not to be choked back.

But presently a faint voice from the bed recalled him to the dying man.

"Ah," said Calanis, in a wailing tone, "I knew it. I knew that for such a lie as that there could be no forgiveness."

No forgiveness! The struggle that went on in the mind of Rex Mansfield at that awful moment no words could describe. He heard the appeal. Yes; it would be an easy thing to turn and mutter the formula taught by the priest, and say the words that were not felt, the words that merely hid the volcano of indignant wrath that burned in his breast. But not in such a fashion could he lie even to this poor wretch, by whom his own life had been so cruelly slain, his hopes blighted, his love poisoned. No; it was impossible; there could be no forgiveness for such a wrong; and he would not lie by pretending that it was otherwise.

But even as the bitter thought took possession of his mind some strange spring of memory was touched, and by a subtle association his thoughts were carried back in an instant to the one bright figure that had blessed his early life, that of his mother, who had died whilst he was still a child. What was it that he saw in place of the hideous surroundings of the scene before him? He saw himself, a flaxen-haired boy, kneeling at that mother's feet, and lisping the prayer that can never grow old or commonplace; the one prayer that sums up, in the words of the Master, the whole volume of the petitioning cries that are ever ascending from earth to heaven. He remembered how in those days of innocence his heart had been sorely troubled more than once at the thought that for some trifling childish misdeed no forgiveness might be possible; and he heard again the soothing mother's voice—the voice that had been silent for more than thirty years—conveying to his burdened mind the old lesson of the Divine love and forgiveness.

He awoke as from a dream; and drawing near to the dying man, took his hand in his.

"May God forgive you, Calanis, as freely as I do! And now let me send the priest to you—and farewell!"

When he left the hateful building, the stars were shining in the sky with the soft splendour that is only known in the East. They were the familiar stars which he had known from his childhood upwards ; the constellations he had studied as a boy. Somehow or other it seemed to him that in their silence and their beauty they had a message for his soul from the far-off heavens, and the dead whom he had loved ; and it was a message of peace and good-will, such as the angels had once brought from the Highest to the longing, sinning, suffering children of men.





CHAPTER XL.

THE HARBOUR LIGHTS.



HE Varna mail leaves at two o'clock. You must be quick, old man, if you really must go ; but if you were to take my advice, now, you would at least see your doctor before you start. Why, you only came in from Smyrna two hours ago, and you look as white as a ghost ; and now you are talking of taking that tremendous journey overland to Paris !”

“No,” said Rex ; “it is you who are talking of it, Arthur. It is I who mean to take it. All I want you to do for me is to get me my through ticket at the office at Galata, and then if you will kindly meet me on board the boat, we can drink a parting glass of *chianti* together, and wish each other good luck until we meet again.”

He had not lost a moment since the revelation had been made to him which showed him that he was free. At early dawn, after a night spent in pacing restlessly by the water's edge in the harbour of Smyrna, he had gone aboard a steamer which was on the point of sailing for Constantinople ; and now he was hurrying through such slight preparations as needed to

be made for the long journey which lay before him—the journey which was to carry him to the feet of Gladys.

Ponsford could not understand the meaning of his friend's unwonted excitement. The secret of Mansfield's life had never been made known to him, and he was altogether at a loss to account for this sudden accession of feverish energy, which offered so marked a contrast to the calm by which Rex was ordinarily distinguished. Nor could he refuse to take notice of the hectic flush on his friend's face, the shortened breath, the quick, dry cough—the unmistakable danger signals which the weakened body threw out, and which the determined spirit that inspired it seemed bent upon ignoring.

"Can you not go by sea to Marseilles, Mansfield? There is a Messageries boat to-morrow. The sea voyage might set you up, and you would be spared all the fatigue of that dreadful railway ride from Varna. Surely a few days cannot make much difference in any case."

Rex looked at the younger man with a strange smile on his face. "Not much difference?" he said. "Well, perhaps not. But when a vessel has been beating about for days and weeks upon a stormy sea, without a pilot or a chart, and in imminent danger at any moment of foundering, don't you think if it should suddenly come in sight of a fair haven, my boy, and if the harbour lights that had been looked for so long in vain were to blaze up before the eyes of captain and crew, there would be no man among them who would not begrudge even the few moments that had to be passed in any case before the ship was safe in port? My harbour lights are shining ahead of me now, Arthur; and I cannot dally on my way to the fair haven that has so long been forbidden to me."

Ponsford could not understand it. He almost thought that excitement and fatigue were affecting his friend's mind; but he saw that all remonstrance would be in vain, and he wisely busied himself in rendering Mansfield such aid as he could give him.

And at two o'clock precisely they parted; and Ponsford went down the ladder of the big, black vessel of the Austrian

Lloyd's Company with a greater weight at his heart than he could rightly account for. What was it that touched him so keenly as he sat in the little *caïque* in which he was being rowed to the landing-stage, and looking round saw Rex on the upper deck of the great ship waving a last farewell to him? He had parted from Mansfield often before; but had never yet, when doing so, suffered from the oppressive sense of pain that now weighed upon him. What was the meaning of it?

But in Mansfield's heart there was no answering feeling of apprehension. He walked the deck of the ship with proud, firm step and elastic gait that recalled the days of his youth. He scarcely cared to look at that wonderful panorama, unapproached and unapproachable among the sights of the world, that was fading from his view as the ship passed rapidly up the Bosphorus. The minarets and domes, the towers and palaces of Stamboul and Galata and Pera and Scutari, became merged in one undistinguishable mass that glittered with indescribable splendour in the afternoon sunshine. But he saw nothing of the scene; another and a fairer vision was shining before his eyes, and every turn of the screw, every moment as it passed, brought him nearer to its realization. He had no feeling of bodily weakness just now. Weak indeed he was, and he knew it; but the spirit had mastered the frail body, and compelled it to do its bidding. He walked the deck incessantly; taking no notice of his fellow-passengers, or of the villages and palaces they passed in their way toward the Black Sea. Once, indeed, he paused in his ceaseless tramp to watch a great eagle that slowly soared upward from the grey crags above Karibjeh, and poising itself in mid-air, surveyed the whole scene beneath it. And what was this that he murmured to himself as he looked up at the lordly bird, now a mere speck in the azure dome? "Oh, that I had wings as a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest." Yes; it was wings that he wanted now, wings that should annihilate those five days of tedious travel that lay before him, and carry him in an hour to the abode of her whom he loved.

When night fell the ship was rolling heavily in the stormy, phosphorescent waters of the Euxine ; but still he paced the deck, now deserted by everybody else save the silent steersman. What mattered the cold breeze that blew steadily from the east, or the spray that was carried in great sheets over the vessel, drenching him to the skin ! He was turning homewards now, and the fair haven was at last in sight.

They had a rough night ; and the next morning when they anchored in Varna Roads the rain was coming down in torrents, and the swell was so heavy that it was evidently dangerous to land. Not a few of the passengers decided to wait on board the steamer until the weather moderated. But Rex would not wait a moment. No sooner had the post-office cutter carried off the mails than he sprang into a stout broad-beamed boat which six strong rowers had with difficulty brought out from the little port. Owing to the state of the sea, it was impossible to approach the regular landing-place, and for a time it seemed only too probable that he would be compelled to return to the ship. But a rope was thrown from the shore, and he was made fast to it, and at last he was dragged through the boiling surf, and hauled up on the strand bruised and bleeding, and almost breathless.

He could have shouted for joy when he touched the solid earth ; for now the journey westwards would begin in good earnest. What did it matter that the breadth of a continent separated him from Paris and the Avenue d'Eylau ! He was at least no longer at the mercy of the winds and the waves ; but would now make such progress as rail and steam have rendered possible.

And so, an hour or thereabouts after landing at Varna, the long, long railway journey began. To Rex it all seemed like a dream ; and yet there were moments when that dream appeared to have absorbed the greater portion of his life. The monotonous grinding of the wheels at times lulled him into a fitful slumber ; but for the most part he sat wide awake, and looking out upon the country through which he was passing ;

upon the savage, billowy uplands of Bulgaria ; upon the great Roumanian plains, and the Hungarian valleys green with the growing maize crop. He travelled both by day and by night, with the exception of one night—which he was forced to spend at Bucharest. By and by, as the days passed, and he found himself traversing the civilized and cultivated districts of Austria and Bavaria, he began to be conscious that his weakness had grown upon him to such an extent that it was no longer possible to master it ; and there was a sinister pain in his chest, a pain that lingered obstinately in one particular spot, such as he had never known before, and that troubled him greatly. He felt that he must husband his strength, such as it was ; for did it not belong to another now ?

Pesth, Vienna, Munich, Strasbourg—and so at last the lights of Paris ! The train had been delayed by some slight accident upon the line, and it was consequently long after nightfall when the terminus was reached. His head was giddy ; he could scarcely walk when, after those long days and nights of journeying, he set foot upon the platform. But gradually the dazed feeling passed from him. He looked round upon the familiar scene, and knew that he was in Paris, and that she too was within hearing of the multitudinous sounds of the great city.

He had not doubted for a single instant since he set forth on his journey that he would find her here, under the roof of Mrs. Carmichael, in the Avenue d'Eylau. Down to the moment when Calanis revealed his secret to him, he had been willing to admit to his own heart that Gladys might possibly be married. It was nearly two years now since he had parted from her at Nice, and with the single exception of the letter she had written to him in answer to his own, not a word had reached him from her. Again and again during his painful wanderings, and his long sojourn in Constantinople, he had owned to himself that it was more than possible that she might have left Paris, and have gone away perhaps as the wife of another. But from the hour when he knew that he was free, every doubt or fear of this kind had vanished. And he had

come across Europe with this breathless speed certain of finding her in the spot he knew.

He drove to his old hotel in the Rue du Helder, and forced himself to eat, and bathed and changed his travel-stained garments. And then, though it was now late at night, he drove straight to the Avenue d'Eylau. There was a brilliant blaze of light in the windows of the third and fourth floors, those occupied by the *pension*; but upon the fifth floor a single window only was feebly lighted. Ah, she was there! she was there!

Trembling with excitement, he climbed the long staircase. More than once he had to pause to catch his breath, and to allow the intolerable pain in his chest to subside. He passed the door leading to the *pension*, and knew from the mingled sounds of music and laughter which issued from it that a party was going on. But he was up at the fifth floor now, and with quivering, nerveless fingers, pulling the handle of the bell.

A bright servant-maid whom he did not remember opened the door. She was obviously startled when she saw this hollow-eyed stranger, who could scarcely utter the name of the woman whom he came to seek.

"No," she told him, "mademoiselle was not at home. She was below, at the ball in the *pension*. Monsieur was a friend of mademoiselle? Ah, then, he perhaps knew that this ball was in honour of mademoiselle, a farewell to her, before she left Paris for ever?"

"What," said the girl, when she saw how Mansfield's face changed as she spoke; "could it be that monsieur was the friend of Mademoiselle Fane, and yet did not know that on the morrow she left Paris for England for her father's house, under the charge of 'milord'?"

"Milord!" gasped Rex, in bewilderment. "Who is that?"

"Oh, it is milord Lostviteel," said the maid, boldly grappling with the difficulties of Lostwithiel's title; "Ah, milord was the great friend of mademoiselle," she continued, smiling significantly in the stranger's face, "and now he was escorting her

back to England ; and who could tell what might not happen ? One thing was certain, milord loved mademoiselle to desperation ; and as for mademoiselle herself, well, for her own part, she knew how the affair was bound to end."

He asked her to allow him to rest for a moment in the little ante-chamber. His heart was faint and sick, and his brain was reeling. But he had not fairly grasped the meaning of the girl's words. No, he said to himself again and again, he had misunderstood her, or she had lied.

In trembling characters, strangely unlike the firm bold hand of old, he pencilled a few lines upon a scrap of paper :

"MY DARLING,—I am free. I have come to you at once. I left Smyrna on Thursday, and reached Paris an hour ago. I am in the fair haven at last ; and you, too, my darling ! REX."

He did not think that it was strange after nigh two years of silence to address the woman whom he loved in this fashion. No ; had he not her letter, here in his pocket ; the letter in which she swore that she would be true to him throughout her life ? And he knew her too well to doubt her.

He left the little note upon the hall table, and got up from his seat and slowly moved away. The maid was so much struck by his appearance, that she begged him to remain a little longer, and offered to bring him wine or brandy if he needed it.

But he refused, and went downstairs, groping his way as though he had been smitten with blindness. The door leading to the *salon* of the *pension* was standing ajar. He stopped there almost unconsciously. She was within at this moment, one of the laughing throng. Ah, how little she knew that *he* was there, just outside ; that all the long years of waiting were at an end, and joy and peace had come home at last to both of them !

He crept nearer, thinking that perhaps he might catch the accents of the dear voice amid that babble of talk. He would have known it again, though a thousand years had passed since

its music had last fallen upon his ears. And as he listened, sudden silence fell upon the company within—a silence broken only by low murmurs of admiration.

This was what was happening at that moment in the *salon* of the *pension*. There was a large company present, chiefly of the Parisians and the American visitors to Paris whose acquaintance had been made by Gladys during the time she had spent under Mrs. Carmichael's roof. The party was, in fact, as the maid had told Mansfield, a farewell entertainment in her honour. It was true that on the morrow she was going away, going back to her old home in Northumberland, under the charge of the man whose love for her was no secret to most of that company. And so they had met to do honour to her, and the bright English girl was the queen of the little assembly.

She had never looked more beautiful than she did to-night; and yet it was apparent to all that there was a shadow on her face, a touch of pathos in its expression, that seemed somewhat out of place at such a moment, when the girl's long exile was at an end, and she was returning to home and friends and love. No one but Mrs. Carmichael guessed what it was that gave to the bright beauty of Gladys that more tender and pensive aspect which it wore to-night. And she knew but in part. It was Gladys herself alone who knew that she was bidding farewell not merely or even chiefly to the friends around her, but to the cherished memories of her most sacred hours, to the dear hope to which her heart had clung during two years of sad endurance, and which had been to so large an extent the inspiring and sustaining power of her life since she had first known it.

It was much, doubtless, to know that she was returning to her own home in triumph; nay,—who can tell? so strange and complex are the springs of feeling in these hearts of ours—there may perchance have been comfort for her even now in the knowledge that a new life was possibly opening before her in which, as Mansfield had suggested, she would not be alone nor altogether useless in the world. But amid and above it all

there rose the strong feeling of self-pity as she thought how Fate had been too strong for her and for him, and had driven them apart for ever.

But she was allowed little time for such reflections to-night. The leading feature of the entertainment of the evening was a series of *tableaux vivants*, in the arrangement of which her artistic eye and touch had been in great request, and in the final scene of which she was to be the leading and indeed the only figure.

The curtain had just risen upon this last scene, when Rex noticed that sudden hush in the conversation as he crept close to the door of the *salon*. There were those low murmurs of admiration and delight which he had observed, and then the whole company broke out into tumultuous cries of applause. It was the Maid of Orleans at the stake whom they saw standing before them—clad in a loose robe of white, with her black hair falling in a tangled mass upon the exquisitely shaped shoulders, and her face raised heavenwards, the eyes burning with faith and tenderness and purity.

Again and again the shout of applause broke from the throats of the men, and the women clapped their hands; for surely never had a lovelier personation of the maiden martyr been offered to the world than this. But even as they gazed in delight and applauded with all their might, there was a scream from an affrighted girl, and a hoarse cry of horror from the other guests; and a sudden flash of fire darted up the light drapery which hung round the miniature proscenium, and in an instant a transparent wall of flame had spread itself between the spectators and Gladys at the stake.

It had all happened so instantaneously that for a moment the horror-stricken mass of onlookers were paralyzed. Gladys did not move, though already the flames were darting towards her with venomous tongues. The brave, calm air she wore now was such as the Maid herself might have worn at the moment when her funeral pile was fired. Some of the men with confused courage stumbled towards her; but the affrighted women

were between them and the stage—to say nothing of that awful sheet of flame.

But what was this strange thing that happened in the twinkling of an eye? A great joy came into the girl's face, and it became radiant, not with the scorching flashes that leapt around her, but with a light like that of a transfigured soul, and she stretched forth her arms and cried in a voice that was heard far above the shrieking of the women and the shouts of the men. It was one word only that came from those parted lips, the name of the man she loved, and then she fell forward on the burning stage.

Ere the flames had time to close in upon her his arms were round her, and she was saved. He had not even seen that barrier of fire which was so terrible to the others. He had seen only the shining face and the outstretched arms of his darling; and that sight had not alone given his feeble body "strength as the strength of ten," but had borne him reckless and almost scatheless through the flames and to her side.

And now he held her close, and carried her out; and as the wondering crowd closed round them, he laid her with a cry of rapture in the cool outer air upon the stairs of the house, and knelt at her feet kissing the fair hand that rested in his.

Gladys opened her eyes slowly; and then the rosy flush of new-born joy suffused her face; and in an instant her arms were round his neck and she was clasping him to her, with wild cries of love and gladness.

But there was no response from Rex to that warm embrace from the woman whom he loved. She felt his form suddenly grow heavy in her arms, and she sprang to her feet affrighted.

"Ah, he has fainted! my darling; he is hurt!"

The fire in the *salon* had been subdued almost as quickly as it had arisen; and the wonder-stricken guests had gathered round Gladys and her deliverer. One of the company was a doctor; he knelt beside the figure of Rex now prostrate on the stairs. A little stream of crimson hue was flowing gently from his mouth. The doctor pointed to it with a grave face.

“Dear mademoiselle, the gentleman has broken a blood-vessel in the lungs. The exertion has been too much for him.”

They carried him very gently upstairs, and bore him into the room of Gladys, where they laid him on her bed. His face was hardly more white and rigid than that of the girl herself.

“Will he live?” she said, in an agonized whisper, to the doctor, when all needless intruders had left the little chamber, and she and Mrs. Carmichael were free from their officious aid.

“While there is life we may always hope,” said the doctor, in that hard phrase which, as though in mockery of the thing of which it speaks, is so often employed to carry despair into anguished human hearts.

And Gladys knew then that Fate had been too much for them after all, and that the end was at hand. They had met but to be parted.

The weeping maid-servant at this moment brought the girl the note which Rex had left for her, and she tore it open with trembling fingers.

“Free!” Yes, the noble heart had no need to tell her that. Not otherwise would he have been found there at such a time. “Free, and in the fair haven!” She remembered how, in the sweet days that now were gone for ever, he had thanked God on her behalf, because whatever trials might beset her path, she yet had freedom and youth.

And now, she thought, these gifts from the gods had come to him also. He was free at last, and in that fair haven towards which the broken bark was drifting rapidly the prize of perpetual youth awaited him.

But for her—ah, for her! What had life left in it so fair as this? What could it give her that would compensate her, even partially, for all that she had now lost, for all that was now slipping from her grasp?

She knelt beside his bed, and cried on Heaven for mercy and for help. Her friend held her hand; they were alone now with the man whom they both knew and loved; and their tears

flowed together as they watched for the end. Once she rose and went to the window. She drew aside the curtain ; and looked out upon the great city, slumbering beneath the silent stars. There were a million men and women hard by, hidden beneath that brooding cloud of night. But to Gladys it seemed that all around her was the blank emptiness of space. What were all the men and women upon the earth compared with this man ; who had been her own in the sight of God for these two years, and who now, at the moment when he had come to claim her, had been struck down by the stern hand of Fate—struck down before her very eyes ? “ Let me die too ! O God, let me die too ! ” was the unspoken cry that went up from her heart in that moment of supremest woe. But no answering voice came from the cold and distant heavens. With a passionate gesture of despair she turned from the casement, and flung herself beside him on the bed, where he lay with a face that had already grown strangely calm, and lips that seemed to smile as in some happy dream.

It might have been some three hours after he had been laid upon that white couch that Rex opened his eyes, and gazed wonderingly around. The solemn dawn was just breaking in the eastern sky ; but it was by the red light of the lamp that he saw the strangely attired figure beside him—for Gladys still wore the dress in which Jeanne d’Arc faced her martyrdom.

He knew her in a moment ; and a smile of ineffable love and contentment lighted up his face—which to her seemed as the face of a god. He sought her hand and tried to raise it to his lips, but his strength failed him. Then she leaned over him, and with her right arm twined round his neck, whilst her other hand held his in the firm grasp of life and youth, she pressed upon his pallid lips the sacred kiss of a last farewell.

Again there was a faint smile upon his face ; and then he spoke in a clear, low voice, that thrilled her very soul by the far-off memories which it brought back to her.

“ The harbour lights ! ” was all he said.

And with this cry, surely a cry of joy upon the lips of the storm-tossed voyager, Rex Mansfield entered into his desired haven.

* * * * *

There is in Père-la-Chaise a lonely grave, on which, with each returning year, the white flower of the narcissus blooms freely. In its purity and fragrance it bears faithful witness to the nature of the love which it commemorates.

THE END.

